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THE ADOLESCENT VOICE: STRESS, COPING & IDENTITY

by

JOCELYN DAWN EDEY ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE.

Centre for Health Promotion Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1999

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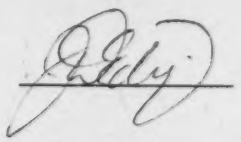

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Dr. Wendy Austin

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April 16, 1999
Date

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family in appreciation of the life of love and support that I have been blessed with .

ABSTRACT

Teenagers struggle with feelings about themselves, relationships, and future prospects. Inability to cope with such stress has been noted to lead to lower grades, risk of self-harm, suicide, and depression. Despite these concerns, there is surprisingly little information on how stress and coping is perceived from the adolescent's perspective. The purpose of this descriptive study was to describe and explore adolescent stress and coping.

Adolescents were provided with the opportunity to describe the everyday stresses they face and the methods of coping they use. They indicated that most of their everyday stresses centered on the central theme: search for identity, answering the question: "Who am I?" Stress frequently originated in the school environment and their various relationships. Effective coping methods were primarily those that allowed them to deal with the feelings and emotions that were consequences of the stress. These included: "escape", "knowing" "someone is always there", and "grin and bear it."

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adolescence in the early 1900's was defined as a period in which "new dangers threaten on all sides" and, as the most critical stage of life, where failure to overcome the associated threats can mean "retrogression, degeneracy, or fall" (Hall, 1904, p.72). Today, empirical evidence contradicts such a 'storm and stress' viewpoint but there continues to be cause for concern about the emotional and mental health of young Canadians. A study by the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (FPT) (FPT, 1996) found that young people in Canada are struggling with feelings about themselves, their relationships, and future prospects, and there is evidence of growing levels of depression and stress, and decreasing levels of psychological well-being and job satisfaction (FPT, 1996).

The 'large-scale' changes in the number and nature of demands confronting adolescents (Allen & Hiebert, 1991) and the way they cope with both major and minor stresses is of particular relevance in assisting adolescents to develop in a healthy manner (Sieffge-Krenke, 1993). Allen & Hiebert (1991) found that compared to the population at large, adolescents' stress levels are higher and frequently surpass their coping resources. Effective coping strategies may lower some stressful events and experiences to the level of temporary disruptions while less effective strategies may promote stress and contribute to long-term, pervasive negative outcomes (Compas, Oroson, & Grant, 1993). What is unclear, however, are what types of coping strategies are effective for adolescents. Coping skills help people interact effectively with the world around them, to cope with the events, challenges, and stress they encounter in their everyday lives. People with effective coping strategies are enabled to solve problems, be self-reliant, and make informed choices which promote their health. Inadequate coping in adolescents has been related to adjustment problems, such as lower grades, risk of self-harm, suicide, and depression.

Gaps in Research

The successes and achievements of research using adolescents as participants have unfortunately been overshadowed by the gaps in knowledge that continue to exist (Society for Adolescent Medicine, 1995). According to Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman (1993), research on the relationships between stressful life events and coping in adults remains an area of undiminished interest, whereas, comparable work with adolescents has been far less extensive. In a review of the past twenty years of research in this area, only 7% of the studies found dealt specifically with adolescent coping (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993; Seiffge-Krenke, 1993). Thus, the type of coping strategies used by adolescents and the function they serve warrants further investigation (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993).

Past research does provide a strong foundation for the investigation of stress and critical life events (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993) but there is a gap in research in the area of everyday stress or "daily hassles" experienced by adolescents and the methods to cope with such problems (Spirito, Stark, Grace, & Stamoulis, 1991; Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987). This gap in examining everyday stress has meant that the cumulative effects of both minor and major stressful events and processes are not fully understood (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993).

Few researchers have actually identified the type of stressors adolescents face because of the use of forced-choice formats rather than providing an opportunity for individuals to spontaneously generate the personal problems they have recently faced (Spirito et al.,1991; Phelps & Jarvis, 1994). Phelps & Jarvis (1994) report that because of the limited information generated by forced-choice methods of data collection there is a need to better understand both the stressors adolescents are experiencing and the coping methods they report using to deal with their stress.

Filling the Gaps

A review of findings from past studies showed that minor events or everyday problems may remain "psychologically salient over time and require continuing adaptive efforts, which may ultimately be more taxing" (p. 173) than efforts focused on coping with major events (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993). These researchers recognized the importance of such everyday events and the potential negative influence of such an additive, cumulative effect. This present study therefore, is an effort to give adolescents a voice, a chance to express their concerns, tell how they cope, and discuss their views on what can or should be done to help them. Providing an opportunity for adolescents to freely identify what they are dealing with and how they cope without limiting the type and variation of responses, while also allowing for explanations, discussions, and expansion of ideas, will be a very useful and beneficial contribution to the understanding of adolescent stress and coping.

Researchers have frequently obtained information about the tasks and manifestations of adolescence but they have been less successful at securing the *essence* of adolescence, as experienced by adolescents themselves (Feldman & Elliot, 1993). According to Feldman and Elliot (1993) learning how to elicit information on what youth think and feel about themselves, about events in their lives, and about their understanding of their behaviours would be an enormous benefit to research. Examining adolescents' subjective and cognitive appraisals of a situation (Compas et al., 1993) is essential because effective coping strategies are believed to depend, in part, on the limitations that personal perceptions place on people (Moriarty & Toussieng, 1976). In addition, Millstein, Nightingale, Petersen, Mortimer, & Hamburg (1993) note that additional research in the areas of how adolescents view their life situations, how they deal with critical decisions and stress, and their motivations for particular behaviors are needed to address gaps in research. To help adolescents learn what they have to do, to develop and survive

and create, understanding of adolescents' circumstances, tasks, and obstacles must be obtained (Hamburg, 1992).

Health promotion is an area of study and practice that the has potential to establish, improve and maintain health and well-being in various populations. Health promotion programs aimed at adolescents can be utilized to improve their quality of life. In order for health promotion activities to be beneficial, researchers must consider the nature of the stresses with which adolescents are dealing, the adequacy of their coping skills (Allen & Hiebert, 1991), and the conditions, behaviors and supports that adolescents state are useful to enhance their well-being. Activities aimed at the promotion of adolescent health should be applied to the "enhancement, disruption, or modification, as appropriate, of the unfolding process (and conditions) that lead to well-being or serious mental health or social problems" (Silverman & Felner, 1995, p.75). As Millstein et al. (1993) note, it is essential to recognize and respond to the population to which the activities are directed and that successful health promotion needs to be acceptable to the targeted individuals, cultural groups, and communities for which health promotion is intended. By determining what resources adolescents need could help to decrease the demands that they are dealing with and subsequently increase effective coping strategies (Allen & Hiebert, 1991).

Purpose of Study

In response to the lack of information on adolescent stress and coping from adolescents' perspective, the purpose of this study is to describe and explore the stresses adolescents face and the coping strategies used to cope.

Research Questions

The guiding research question for this study was: 'How do adolescents cope with the stresses in their lives?' Sub-questions included: What do adolescents perceive as stressful? What are common coping strategies used by adolescents? Are some events/activities perceived as more stressful than others are? What do adolescents need or want to improve or maintain effective coping?

Significance

The implications and results of this study are intended to increase the understanding of how adolescents cope with stress, in order to promote and enhance their overall well-being. There is an urgency in helping adolescents cope in today's society. In fact this study evolved from the researcher's concern and interest in the area of youth suicide in Alberta.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of adolescent deaths. It is reported in the research literature that many Canadian adolescents describe being very depressed at least once a month and over 22% of adolescents, in one study, said they have tried to kill themselves (COMPAS, 1993). According to a task force on suicide in Canada, in 1991 Alberta had a suicide rate of 18.3 (per 100,000), which was second only to the Northwest Territories (Health Canada, 1994). The rate for males aged 15 to 19 years in Alberta was 28.6 in 1992, which was a significant jump from 6.00 for the 10 to 14 year olds during the same year (Health Canada, 1994). The suicide rate for females aged 15 to 19 was 11.1, also a jump from 2.1 for 10 to 14 year olds (Health Canada, 1994). These statistics demonstrate the significance of the issue of adolescent suicide, and illustrate that as children enter the 15 to 19 age range, things are happening that may cause adolescents to lose hope and feel that suicide is the only way to escape and deal with their troubles.

A number of conditions and risk factors have been identified that precipitate adolescent suicidal behaviour; academic and behavioural problems; transition problems; interpersonal conflict; lack of assistance from professional care givers; ease of access to health care system; reticence to seek help (Dyck, Mishara, & White, 1996); antisocial behaviour resulting in legal difficulties; exposure to suicide; and personality problems, such as inhibition, perfectionism, and explosiveness (Brent, Kolko, 1990; Pardes & Blumenthal, 1990). Brent & Kolko (1990) and Shaffer, Garland, Gould, Fisher, & Troutman (1988) also provide convergent evidence that the majority of adolescent suicide victims have at least one major psychiatric disorder at the time of death. Health Canada (1994) reported that family dysfunction is often related to suicide and

suicidal youth are commonly comprised of "well-behaved, anxious, perfectionistic, youngsters who cope poorly with change" (p. 21). For some adolescents the normative issues of sexuality and achievement are experienced as overwhelming unmanageable and appear to contribute to suicidality (Rubenstein, Heeren, Houseman, Rubin & Stechler, 1989). Health Canada (1994, p. 21) also report that the majority of suicides occur in depressed and/or substance abusing youth, often with a "seemingly trivial humiliation" as the precipitating factor.

It has been proposed that suicide prevention efforts need to focus on direct efforts to increase (or decrease) the levels of conditions of risk, protective factors, and experiences that enhance development to which a population is exposed (Silverman & Felner, 1995). Similarly Adams, Overhosler, & Spirito (1994) call for studies which examine the role of those factors that are able to decrease the negative impact of chronic strains. What are these protective factors and experiences that are beneficial to youth? By asking adolescents directly, this information can be attained; this study was an effort to do so.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

An electronic and manual literature review was conducted to determine what research has been done and to obtain the most relevant and useful information on adolescent coping and stress. Searches of Social Science Abstracts, sociofile, psycINFO, ERIC, and CINAHL were conducted. The following search terms were used: stress, personality, well-being, coping, coping styles, health promotion, life events, resiliency, and adolescence. Books, journal articles, and government documents were examined during the literature review.

Historical Review

What is adolescence? Is it a time of intense upheaval, which results in rebellious and risky behaviors? Is adolescence a period of life that is negotiated with relative ease and has no more challenges than any other developmental period? Obviously not all teens experience adolescence in the same way but researchers for many years have been attempting to develop a view of adolescence and the variation and range of views is quite extensive. This review will present a historical outlook of the literature on adolescence and adolescent development.

Historical Perspective of Adolescence

Examining past conceptualizations and treatment of adolescents will demonstrate how views of adolescence have been influenced by various societal factors. Childhood and youth were vague concepts in Europe in the 16th & 17th centuries, and it was the activities in which young people took part that were definitive, not their age (Modell & Goodman, 1993). Historians of the 17th & 18th centuries began to report the presence of youth cultures; youth were given extra attention because they were believed to hold promise and hope for the larger society (Modell & Goodman, 1993). Similarly, a religious preoccupation with the problems of youth developed as the context of society was becoming more secular and heterogeneous (Modell & Goodman, 1993).

The concept of youth changed with the industrialization of society. The bench marks for the attainment of adult status during this time was more uncertain than before and, such status was commonly achieved within institutional environments where youth were in close contact with each other, instead of integrated with adults whom they could use as role models (Modell & Goodman, 1993). Throughout this Age of Industrialization the development of controlled institutions continued in response to the new environment of the city.

In the early 20th century in Britain and America the period of adolescence became prolonged in response to the evolution of modern capitalism and the modern welfare state (Modell & Goodman, 1993). There were three major social changes that were particularly important in this extension of adolescence: the introduction of mandatory education, child labour laws, and the concept of juvenile justice (Atwater, 1996). Although these changes were created primarily to protect youth, they had the unintended result of prolonging youth's dependence on adults (Atwater, 1996). Schools stressed the importance of tasks aimed at preparing for the future and the school became a "template against which young people could be placed to judge the age appropriateness of their behavior" (Modell & Goodman, 1993, p.118).

Theoretical Perspectives of Adolescence

The first psychologist to pursue a psychology of adolescence using scientific methods was G. Stanley Hall (1844 to 1924) (Muuss, 1988). Hall characterized adolescence as the time of 'storm and stress' in his 1904 publication: *Adolescence; its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education.* In this early view of adolescence, which is still held by some clinical and lay commentators, youth was seen as a period of extreme "inner turmoil and outward conflict" (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). Early writers such as Hall and Erikson illustrated adolescence as a time of periodic psychological crises, as youth tried to handle the psychological and societal tasks of this phase of development (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). Similarly, Mohr & Despres (1958) state that "while many adolescents go

through this stormy decade with relatively little upset, others show such variable and unpredictable behavior that adolescence is often considered a time of 'normal instability'" (p.54).

Coming after Hall, Sigmund Freud (1856 to 1939) developed a psychoanalytic theory of human development in which he placed relatively minor emphasis on pubescence and adolescence. This occurred because of Freud's preoccupation with the role of infantile sexuality in normal and abnormal development and he stressed the importance of the first five years of life in human development, climaxing in the Oedipus complex (Muuss, 1988). The foundation of Freud's developmental theory was the psychosexual stages of human development: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages (Muuss, 1988). Although Freud did not place much direct attention on the adolescence stage of development his psychosexual stages were influential on other theorists, such as A. Freud, Blos, Sullivan, and Erikson (Muuss, 1988) who studied adolescence more specifically.

Erik Erikson (1902 to 1994) argued that Freud neglected the period of adolescence and attempted to amend this theoretical absence (Muuss, 1988). Erikson asserted that the study of identity was more important than Freud's study of sexuality (Muuss, 1988). Of special importance for adolescents he argued was identity formation; that is, "the establishment and reestablishment of sameness with one's previous experiences and a conscious attempt to make the future a part of one's personal life plan" (Muuss, 1988, p.62). Identity formation involves a search for continuity of the self's attributes over time and a search for a unified self that integrates new roles that they will assume (Berk, 1991).

Erikson expanded on Freud's basic psychosocial framework by emphasizing psychosocial outcomes of development and the importance of understanding each stage of development in relation to a child's unique life situation and cultural context (Berk, 1991). Harry Stack Sullivan (1892 to 1949) was also developing theories that emphasized the environment during this period, but he incorporated more sociological concepts into his theories of development. Sullivan developed the Interpersonal Theory of Adolescent Development. This

theory was strongly influenced by sociologic and anthropologic thinking and stressed the social context of human experiences. Thus, interpersonal relationships and communication were of central importance (Muuss, 1988). Sullivan believed that Freudian theory and therapy did not acknowledge the value of social relationships (Zimbardo, 1985) and proposed that interactions with others are critical to normal development and the "destructive, anxiety-arousing manifestations [of interpersonal relationships] provide explanations for immaturity, deviance, and psychopathology" (Muuss, 1988, p.114). Sullivan stated that personality is a "relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterize a human life"(Sullivan, 1953, p.111). According to Sullivan's theory of development the way people view themselves and the way they behave, depends on who they are interacting with, while the sense of self is influenced by the way in which influential people see and treat individuals (Muuss, 1988).

Sullivan was criticized for neglecting the female's viewpoint of development. Muuss (1988) states that if Sullivan's theory is examined from the perspectives of researchers, such as Gilligan and Kendel, his theory is of greater relevance to a 'psychology of women' than were the traditional psychoanalytical theories due to their focus on the centrality of genitality and sexuality. Unfortunately, the feminine values that are hinted at in his work were not made more pronounced in his writing (Muuss, 1988). The Interpersonal Theory of Adolescent Development emphasizes the importance of relationships and the overall contributing environment to any social issue.

Today's Theoretical Perspectives of Adolescence

There is agreement among a number of disciplines that adolescence is a time of extraordinary physical and psychologic growth and change, an age of transition (Mitchell, 1996) and a period of obvious vulnerability related to this change (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). Theorists who believe in this *storm and stress* view of adolescence emphasize the combination of internal growth and external societal restraints, which result in elevated anxiety within adolescents and the society in which they live (Mitchell, 1986). They note further that this period is characterized by

distressing and turbulent thoughts, feelings, and actions and "those who do not display such erratic thoughts and feelings are not spared, however. Not only is the display of pathology considered pathological, but the lack of display of pathology is also pathological" (Hobfoll, 1988, p.162).

In contrast to the storm and stress perspective, Elliot & Feldman (1993) state that for most, adolescence is (or should be) a period of "expanding horizons and self-discovery as skills are acquired for establishing adult roles" (p.1). Atwater (1996) states that adolescence is best defined as "the period of rapid growth between childhood and adulthood, including psychological and social development" (p.5). Adolescence has also been referred to as an urgent, bewildering, and exciting time (Mitchell, 1996). Another author regards adolescence as "less a stage than a number of circumstances in which youth find themselves and within which options and gratifications are uniquely restricted" (Frydenberg, 1997, p.7). Mitchell (1996) states that the defining features of adolescence are growth, change, and improvement. This view of change is not new and is comparable to that expressed by Aristotle who noted the main characteristic of adolescence is the development of the ability to choose, and noted that "only if the youth voluntarily and deliberately chooses will he develop the right kind of habits and thus in the long run build the right kind of character" (Muuss, 1988, p.8). This concept of growth continues to remain essential to many definitions of adolescence.

Much of the literature on adolescence is based on *adults'* views and perceptions of adolescence. For example Elliot & Feldman (1993) report that adults see adolescence as a period of either "unparalleled potential, focusing on the physical beauty, idealism, optimism, and enthusiasm of youth" (p.2) or view adolescents as social rebels who are "disrespectful, disorderly, hedonistic, and promiscuous" (p.2). These two extreme adult perceptions of adolescence flourish because this period of life has received little scientific scrutiny (Elliot & Feldman, 1993). Modell & Goodman (1993) state that adolescence is "an organized set of expectations closely tied to the structure of adult society" (p.93), which results in adults manufacturing adolescence.

The length or duration of adolescence has been discussed in the literature from a number of points of view in efforts to explain the purpose of adolescence. Present views of the length of adolescence see adolescents growing up faster than their predecessors because of a number of social factors (Atwater, 1996). Elkind (1984) reports that in this rapidly changing society, "there is no place for teenagers" (p.3). The age of onset of adolescence is occurring earlier due to parental expectations and earlier pubertal maturation (Newton, 1995). Adolescents are expected to confront life and its difficulties, with little preparation, and with the maturity once expected of the middle aged adult (Elkind, 1984). Elkind (1984) states that this early adulthood affects youth in two important ways. First, the shortened amount of protected, pressure-free time necessary for the building of personal identities can harm the creation of necessary self-definition. This deficit can result in adolescents being more vulnerable and less capable to deal with inevitable future challenges. Second, youth are exposed to more stress than any past generations. These stresses stem from three categories: (1) more freedoms available than in past generations; (2) experience of loss of sense of security and expectations for the future, which previous generations did not encounter; and (3) coping with the frustration of attempting to prepare for their future careers in school environments that hinder rather than promote this goal. A combination of future shock and marginal status has resulted in a contemporary society where adolescents have to make essential decisions at earlier and earlier ages about drugs, sex, free time activities, the role of parents as authority figures, and numerous other value-laden issues (White, 1989).

The early onset of adolescence suggests that adolescents are being expected to grow up more on their own with lower levels of support in an uncertain time. Such conditions of ambiguity, unpredictability, and individuality can assert a substantial demand on personal resources for maintaining standards of performance and achievement (Fried, 1975). White (1989) states that "it is not acceptable for adolescents to show the spontaneity, forgetfulness, and playfulness of children, yet they are not allowed the assertiveness, independence, and inherent decision-making perogatives of adults" (p. 8). If adolescents are not allowed to 'be young' then it

seems logical that many will chose what they perceive as behaviours that are identified with adulthood, such as drug and alcohol use and sexual promiscuity.

Newton (1995) provides a contrary explanation of the length of adolescence, which states that adolescence is beginning earlier in the life cycle but the end of adolescence does not appear to be occurring earlier; instead it has been extended. According to Newton (1995) adolescence has expanded from a five to six year period to a length of eleven to twelve years in this century. This involves delayed expectations of adult status and rights, which results in insecurity and confusion for "young adults and their status, expected roles, and behavior" (p. 25).

Today's Adolescents

Feldman & Elliot (1993) state that today's youth face demands and expectations, in addition to risks and temptations, that seem more numerous and more complex than any confronting youth only a generation ago and despite this, the majority of youth appear to successfully move through adolescence into adulthood. Changes within the past decade are "dramatic by evolutionary and historic standards" (p.2) and never before have such swift and elaborate transformations occurred in our lifetime (Hamburg, 1997). The speed of social change, exposure to various secular and religious value systems, and modern technology make the world appear overwhelming to the adolescent; far too complex, too relativistic, unpredictable, and dangerous to provide a stable frame of reference for the future (Muuss, 1988).

There is debate, however whether it is really the 'speed of social change' that is making adolescent's frame of reference unstable. Adolescents seem to thrive on advances in technology and are assumed to be unpredictable themselves, perhaps the adults and parents of today's youth are trying to "hang on" in the midst of society's constant and rapid changes. Perhaps it is adult society's unwillingness to change and adapt to today's circumstances that has resulted in adolescents not receiving the support and guidance necessary. Hamburg (1992) supports this idea by stating that there is an urgent need to improve our capabilities to deal with the challenges of adolescent development and initiate changes in adolescent preparation for adulthood. This

involves taking into account the extreme societal alterations that have recently occurred and are still swiftly underway.

Along with changes in technology, education and career prospects, the economy and its commercial focus has also changed. Studies have found that a high percentage of youth are working, though the percentage has decreased more recently. For example, in 1986 Mitchell reported that one study found 60% of grade 12 students and 40% of grade 10 students working part-time. A more recent study of Alberta's youth found that 40 to 45% of youths are working (Sunter, 1992; as cited by Lawton, 1994). Lawton (1994) found that in later 1994, near the end of a bad recession, the number of students employed and the number of hours they worked had decreased from its maximum during the economic boom period of the later 1980's. Mitchell argues that today's culture has taken advantage of the working youth population by designing almost everything for teen-agers, catering to the "lesser side of their nature, to the stimulation of their consumer desires and to the deadening of their social perspective" (Mitchell, 1986, p. 109). This leads, he believes, to a decreased sense of obligation and a heightened sense of entitlement and retreat from 'social interest', inviting adolescents to define themselves by appearance, status, and gender, rather than by legitimate, honest, or meaningful productivity. Mitchell (1986) associates this with the character disturbances (not emotional disturbances) of adolescence that account for the most serious problems in the youth population.

A study on youth employment (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986) found that employment negatively affected youth's education; increased spending, especially on luxury items; frequently encouraged, instead of dissuaded, delinquent types of behavior; frequently led to increased alcohol and marijuana use; and cynasisms and scorn developed towards 'low-level' work as opposed to promoting respect for work and the work place. Lawton (1994) believes that this is not due to youth becoming part of the adult world, instead it is a result of youth developing a pseudo-adulthood because they experience working environments that are age-segregated like the schools they attend. In contrast, a meta-analysis of student work and its' affect on education

found a number of studies that did not report significant negative outcomes of work on grades (Lawton, 1994). Due to these findings, some authors emphasize the negligible effect that part-time work may have on academic achievement and conclude that part-time work does not matter (Lawton, 1994). Lawton (1994) however, criticizes this view:

> These writers seem to place more value on the vocational, rather than liberal, ends of education and thus discount the negative effects of part time work. Writers concerned about the possible negative effects of part time work are more likely to emphasize that opportunities are lost and personal growth is curtailed as a result of a premature assumption of adult roles by adolescents (p. 8)

Changes in the structure and function of families has had a resultant effect on adolescents. Hamburg (1997) states that we "live in a time of major family disruption, manifested in a variety of ways, and involving considerable jeopardy to child and adolescent development" (p.5). The direct role of the family in regulating current activities and companions, let alone future careers and lifestyles, has been greatly reduced (Elliot & Feldman, 1993). Elliot & Feldman (1993) state that this role may be missed and if it can not be restructured; substituting institutions or organizations must step in and provide the necessary support.

Technology change, education, future prospects, employment, and families are just some of the possible factors that may contribute stress to today's adolescents. Stress does indeed appear to be a condition of today's youth. A study of 13 to 16 year olds in 1990 found that 47% of males and 55% of females reported that their lives were stressful (CICH, 1994). The Canadian Youth Mental Health and Illness Survey (CYMHIS) completed in 1993 for the Canadian Psychiatric Association found that of the 800 youth interviewed between the ages of 13 and 18 years, 51% were 'really stressed' at least once a month or more (COMPAS, 1993). Feelings of stress, low self-esteem, unhappiness with their own bodies, and loneliness were cited as concerns for many youth (CICH, 1994). For example, when respondents of the COMPAS (1993) survey were asked how often they felt 'really depressed', 33% reported feeling this way at least once a month, while 30% reported that they felt really depressed a few times a year. When asked if they

ever had thoughts of killing themselves, 19% answered yes to this question and 22% reported that they had purposefully tried to kill themselves (COMPAS, 1993).

What are the main causes of this stress? Millstein and Litt found in their 1993 study that the current primary health concerns of adolescents are as follows (in order of prevalence): school and career; health, appearance, and substance use; private self; and social self. For older adolescents, issues regarding school and future career were considered most worrisome. The single biggest source of stress in the lives of those surveyed in the COMPAS (1993) survey was school (68 %) with home/family the second (11%). School being reported by youth to be their major source of stress is related to another common problem of adolescence; school drop-outs. Administrative data in 1989-90 showed that Alberta had the highest non-completion rate of high school in Canada; 40% compared to the 31% national average (CICH, 1994) with a projection of one million dropping out between 1994 and 2002. This is significant in that school drop-outs earn 25-50% less than high school graduates and are twice as likely to be unemployed (Carr, 1994; as cited by CICH, 1994).

Health information shows that youth are at significant risk for certain negative health outcomes. The two leading causes of death for Canadian youth are motor vehicle accidents and suicide, both of which are linked with alcohol consumption and account for 73% of all adolescent deaths (CICH, 1994). Gillis (1995) states that these statistics illustrate that early patterns of alcoholism are apparent in the lifestyles of Canadian youth. Additional Canadian statistics on other major causes of morbidity and mortality indicate that adolescents have high rates of substance abuse, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and mental disorders (CICH, 1994).

The previous examination of statistics surrounding the lives of adolescents paints a fairly bleak and unpromising picture. This is not entirely fair as many youth cope effectively and get through this time not only alive but also free of serious injuries; are healthy, happy and hold promising prospects for the future. For example, the COMPAS (1993) survey found that 92% of

the youth reported coping successfully (well 37%, moderately 34%, very well 21%). Hamburg (1992) also supports the idea of a brighter outlook for adolescents:

> There is not the slightest reason to believe that today's young people are less talented or resourceful than their predecessors, but their circumstances are considerably different, and so, too, their tasks and obstacles. To help them learn what they have to learn to survive and flourish and create, we have to understand these circumstances, tasks, and obstacles better than we now do. Then adults can help children prepare adequately for adult life and perhaps shape a more humane and compassionate society together (p.199)

The CICH (1994) document states that it is the responsibility of people who work with adolescents to find ways to preserve, advance and amend the overall and mental health of youth by keeping up with the times, the changing society, and the attitudes and perceived needs of today's youth. Furthermore, Mitchell (1986) states that it is the responsibility of adults to "protect and nurture the frailties of youth and to promote, to elevate, to give ways to their abundant abilities and aptitudes...[because] without decent intervention, many kids simply cannot make it" (Mitchell, 1986, p. 223).

Stress

The main issue that underpins the negative effect surrounding adolescence appears to be stress. The perspective of adolescents' in understanding this stress is essential as the stressfulness of an event is dependent on a person's perception of that potentially stressful event (Lazarus, 1966). Whether an event is perceived as stressful or not is not only linked to positive development or dysfunction but is also a result of other influencing or mediating factors, such as the meaning attributed to the event by the individual, resources for coping with the event, and efforts undertaken to cope with the event (Compas, 1987).

Stress is "a particular relationship between the person and environment that is appraised as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.19). Generally, it is a combination of events that generate stress and various combinations may lead to different levels of stress (Atwater, 1996). When events upset youth's typical functioning and require them to make an additional effort to maintain or reestablish their

equilibrium, stress is produced (Atwater, 1996). There are a number of different kinds of situations that may cause stress for adolescents: the combination of major and daily life events; personality factors; available resources; and, as stated earlier, how youths perceive and cope with their various life changes (Atwater, 1996). Williams & House (1991) state that there are three factors that may compensate for or moderate the impact of stress on the health of adolescents: social relationships and support, coping, and sense of personal control.

In 1958 Morh & Depres, in their book entitled: *The Stormy Decade: Adolescence*, wrote:

> Many adolescents go through this life period without experiencing undue stress, or even "normal instability", and achieve a full maturity. But sometimes the youth who conforms easily to all demands made on him [or her], and who seemingly escapes the conflicts of adolescence, also misses the opportunity for a fuller development of his [/her] potentialities as a personality (p. 64)

This appropriately introduces the idea that stress for adolescents is not an entirely negative part of life. Stress can have a positive effect, it can challenge adolescents to grow and develop in ways they would not otherwise experience (Atwater, 1996). Exposure to a given stressful situation can increase self-esteem and develop skills that better equip people to deal with similar situations and capitalize on other challenging experiences (Williams & House, 1991). Mild to moderate levels of stress may also focus attention, and increase alertness and efficiency (White, 1989).

Coping

Whether or not one believes that adolescence is a time of extreme turmoil or one of growth and potential, it is clear that adolescents are dealing with stress that is specific to this period of life. Understanding how such stress is dealt with by adolescents will provide important insights into how youth cope with the challenges with which they are confronted. Atwater (1996) states that adolescents who find their lives especially stressful may not have access to support at home or at school, and they may lack effective coping strategies.

Coping has generally been referred to as behaviours used in an effort to manage stressful situations, even if the attempts to cope are not beneficial (Hobfoll, 1988). Similarly Lazarus defines coping as the cognitive and behavioral attempts to handle specific external or internal

demands (and conflicts between them) that are perceived as demanding or overwhelming a person's resources (Lazarus, 1991). Coping involves reactive or proactive behaviours or a combination of both (White, 1989). Occasionally problems are simply ignored and sometimes they are solved (Frydenberg, 1997). Coping generally refers to active efforts to untangle stress and develop effective solutions to the tasks and stipulations of each growth stage and incorporates three central components: 1) understanding the meaning of a troublesome situation, 2) engaging in competent action, and 3) keeping powerful emotions from being too overwhelming (White, 1989).

The most common type of classification of coping strategies is problem-solving and emotion-regulated coping (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). Problem-solving methods address environmental or internal problems that pose a threat. Emotion-regulated coping strategies focus on a distress that is a product of a threat and this strategy is frequently viewed as less effective because it treats the symptom and not the cause of the problem (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). In some situations emotion-regulated coping can lead to positive adaptive outcomes (Hauser & Bowlds, 1993). Hamburg (1992) states that an issue, which is related to emotion-regulated coping, that needs to be addressed is the ease of access to high risk activities or substances that adolescents generally view as recreational, tension-relieving, and gratifying (Hamburg, 1992). If adolescents are using such activities as a way to reduce stress then the ease of access may not be the main concern; what may need more attention are the causes of stress and the lack of more appropriate methods of dealing with the stress.

Adolescents, must implement effective security measures that will assist them to cope with anxiety and sublimate tension, in order to become an adult (Muuss, 1988). Continued development can be blocked if one tries to avoid reality-oriented behaviour and engages in daydreaming and fantasy, or more seriously, dissociates from personal and social difficulties (Muuss, 1988). Knowing if adolescents are using these types of anxiety relieving or stress-

reducing strategies is important in order to fully understand their effectiveness and to be able to promote successful and beneficial coping.

Relevant Research to Adolescent Stress and Coping

During the previous two decades a dramatic increase in research investigating the relationships between coping and stressful life events in adults has occurred and recently this research has broadened to include younger ages and growing attention has been awarded to coping behaviour in adolescence (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993). Earlier studies of adolescent coping were responsible for determining short- and long-term consequences of extremely stressful events on aspects of the coping process and for examining the importance of social support systems (Seiffge-Krenke 1993). Two-thirds of the limited research on the relationship between stressful events and coping of adolescents examined responses to traumatic and critical life events (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993). The typical study examined the reactions of a small homogenous group of adolescents to an extremely stressful, non-normative event (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993).

Seiffge-Krenke (1993) state that since 1985 coping research has been developmentally focused. Events were looked at in wider terms and mediating factors of stresses were analyzed. The approach to studying stress and coping in adolescents has also changed in recent years: (1) more refined methods have been developed; (2) longitudinal studies which incorporate large representative samples are being used; and (3) interest in evaluating how adolescents cope with developmental stressors has helped shift attention to coping with normative events, everyday problems and developmental tasks (Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman, 1993). The study of adolescent stress and coping has developed into an important and interesting area of developmental and clinical psychology (Sieffge-Krenke, 1993). Examples of areas being investigated in more recent studies include developmental changes and stabilities in the nature of coping (Compas et al., 1993) and longitudinal studies to determine the degree to which "stress functions as a cause,

correlate or consequence of psychological distress and psychopathology" (Compas et al, 1993, p.335).

A study by Lai (1994) serves as an illustration of the focus that has been taken in studies of adolescent mental health and well-being. Lai studied the psychosocial well-being of adolescents in Westlock, Alberta. A standardized self-administered questionnaire was used to determine the presence of psychological symptoms, depression, self-esteem, anxiety, and personal problems (Lai, 1994). Participants were not provided with an opportunity to express their own concerns about their mental health. Well-being was assessed by determining the presence or absence of *problems*. Well-being was not assessed by examining positive, healthy behaviours of participants, or how participants perceived they were handling any problems or stresses. An assertion that some of these 'problems' may be part of normal development did not seem to be considered.

Other studies of adolescent mental health have also focused primarily on the absence of health and have been driven by a problem-focused approach, looking mainly at risk behaviors (Millstein et al., 1993). This view of health assumes that if problems are not present then the individual must be healthy. Indeed it is very uncommon for the numerous mental health surveys and studies of adolescent populations to consider issues that adolescents believe are important regarding their own mental health, whether they are positive or negative influences on well-being (Kutcher, Ward, Hayes, Wheeler, Brown, & Kutcher, 1996; Millstein et al., 1993). This is supported by Gillis (1995) who stated that there is a need to identify the diverse sources of social support available to adolescents and the sources of support perceived by them to be most beneficial to their well-being.

A study by Kutcher et al. (1996) attempted to address the lack of adolescent voice by utilizing a survey developed *by adolescents, for adolescents,* to evaluate their mental health. The results from this study showed that most youth are not suffering from serious emotional disturbances, and stress is generally experienced as normal and is handled using healthy coping

methods (Kutcher et al., 1996). These findings support the point that if researchers hold onto the belief that all youths are stressed, this may result in the omission and disregard of important information regarding why many youths do not view themselves as overly stressed, and could lead to the development of false assumptions regarding adolescent health.

Allen & Hiebert (1991) also attempted to incorporate adolescents' perceptions in their study. They examined adolescents' perceptions of their stresses, how well they coped with the situations where they occurred, and how stressfully they experienced those situations. The results of this study demonstrated that adolescents report greater stress levels and fewer coping resources than adults. What was not discovered is whether this was due to actual coping inadequacy, unreasonable situational demands, misperception of coping capabilities, misappraisal of environmental demands, or other influencing factors (Allen & Hiebert, 1991). The researchers report that these data clearly show that the perceived coping resources of the adolescent sample had not kept pace with the confronting demands. They note further that this would be a beneficial area of future research.

Adolescents Voice and Health Promotion

The CICH (1994) document states that "our youth are telling us in many ways that they need support, recognition and hope for their future" (p. 110). The question is are we *listening* to what they are saying? Health promotion programs must include adolescents in the discussions relevant to their lives, and consider their ideas and perceptions (Gillis, 1995). Such participatory frameworks in health promotion capitalize on adolescents' desire for independence in decision making (Gillis, 1995) and encourages ownership and participation in the developed program and other similar beneficial programs. Research has found that individuals with a strong sense of their ability to cope are more likely to engage in health promotive practices than people who have low confidence in themselves and their ability to control their own destiny (Hamburg, 1992). Therefore, a better understanding of youth who are able to overcome difficult life challenges and everyday stresses could have important implications for intervention (Millstein & Litt, 1993).

Mitchell (1996) asserts that the adolescent population is in need of consistent, constructive, decent intervention, for their own health but "no one truly knows how, or where, or when, or for how long, to intervene" (p. xi). It may be possible to decrease the demands which adolescents face, increase their competence in coping with such stress, and teach them how to cope more effectively with their stress reactions if the appropriate intervention focus can be identified (Allen & Hiebert, 1991). By asking adolescents what they are facing, how they handle stresses in their lives, and what they need to be able to cope better, valuable information can be attained that will support beneficial health promotion initiatives. Youth can then be provided with the opportunities to demonstrate and share ways to cope and deal with the stresses and challenges of their lives.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this research was to explore and describe adolescents' perspectives of stress and coping so as to allow the researcher to "make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). An exploratory, descriptive design, using an ethnographic approach to analysis, was utilized in this study. Focus groups and interviews were used to elicit participants' stories, ideas, viewpoints and descriptions. The underlying rationale for using focus groups was that, with appropriate guidance from the focus group facilitator, group participants can describe the abundant details of complex experiences and the reasoning supporting their actions, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes (Carey & Smith, 1994; Basch, 1987; Morgan, 1988). Interviews were particularly helpful for obtaining detailed information about ongoing behaviours (Elliot & Feldman, 1993).

The collected, analyzed and described data were used to gain understanding and insights regarding the coping strategies adolescents use in their experiences with stress. Participants share a common language, and behavioural norms develop out of a common experiences or situations (Morse & Field, 1995). The description of such commonalities across focus groups and interviews, was the first step towards creating an understanding of participants' experiences with stress and coping during their adolescent lives.

The Sample

Adolescents, aged 15 to 17 years, who resided within a one-hour driving distance of a northern Albertan city, were identified as potential research participants. Volunteers who were willing to participate and share experiential information, were able to commit to the amount of time needed for focus groups and possible interviews, and were able to speak and understand English were chosen as participants. Purposeful sampling was used, which involved choosing participants who had a "broad, general knowledge of the topic" (Morse & Field, 1995, p.119).

Adolescents were approached within the school setting. The researcher disseminated information sheets to students in approved classrooms, initiated a discussion of the research and assured that students did not feel obligated to participate in the study because of the school setting. Students who were interested in participating were given information sheets and consent forms for both themselves (Appendixes A & B) and their parents (Appendixes C & D). If parents allowed their children to be involved in the study, they sent the signed consent forms to school with their child. After collecting both consent forms from the students, the researcher again stressed the participants' right to withdraw at any time during the study.

Sample Size

The number of participants who took part in the study was not determined prior to starting the study so that the number of sampling units could be controlled to ensure saturation of categories. Saturation means that a category or area of study is exhausted and that the continued collection of data is redundant (Leininger, 1994). There were three focus group sessions with 5 participants in each group. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three participants from one focus group and two participants from each of the remaining two focus groups.

Sample Characteristics

At the end of each focus group session, a questionnaire (Appendix E) was completed by each study participant. This questionnaire was utilized to collect biographical information in order to describe the participants of the study in more detail.

The participants, eight females and seven males, ranged in age from 15 to 17 (average 16) and were in grades 10 to 12. Most of the participants lived with either their parents only (3) or their parents and siblings (8). The remaining participants lived with their mother and siblings (4). Participants also provided information as to whether they worked and, if so, how many hours a week. Most of the participants in this study (9) reported that they did not work, although two of these students did write that they babysat occasionally. The remaining participants (6) had jobs as volunteers, working with kids, working with maintenance services, gas station attendant, and concession worker. Hours worked per week ranged from 6 to 25 hours.

A description of extracurricular activities indicated that over half the participants in this study take part in sporting activities. A large number are also involved in student council and Student's Against Drunk Driving (SADD) activities. One student volunteers in his extracurricular time. Three participants reported not taking part in extracurricular activities. To the question "what do you do for fun?" the most popular response was again, sporting activities. Visiting friends and listening to music were the next most popular method of having fun, followed by going to parties, shopping, talking on the phone, visiting family, reading, playing on the computer, volunteering, sleeping, singing, alcohol, relaxing, going to/renting movies, and watching TV.

When asked how well they were doing in school the majority (10) of participants reported that they were average students or were doing "pretty well". Two of these respondents said that they would like to be doing better. Three participants stated that they were doing very well and two reported they were not doing well. When asked to describe their future plans, ten of the fifteen participants reported wanting to go to a post-secondary institution. Some of the areas of interest for these respondents included: business, medicine, acting, anthropology, and sociology. One respondent wrote that her future plans included getting married.

Data Collection

Focus Group/Interviewing Process

Three focus groups and seven follow-up interviews were conducted over a seven month period. The focus groups and interviews were held at a time and place that was mutually convenient. The researcher prepared for focus group facilitation and interviewing by reading literature on the use of these techniques in research and by practicing with peers and colleagues. The first focus group session was observed and reviewed by the researcher's thesis supervisor in order to improve focus group skills.

Ethnographic questioning techniques were used as outlined by Spradely (1979) and Morgan (1988). The sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. Field notes were used to describe the physical setting. Memos and journal writing were also used to document the researcher's subjective accounts, feelings, impressions (Morse & Field, 1995), decision processes and personal biases (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

Focus group interviews are a qualitative research technique used to obtain data regarding the feelings, beliefs, and opinions of small groups of informants about a problem, experience, service or other item of interest (Basch, 1987). Focus groups are utilized for a number of reasons: (1) large amounts of data can be gathered in a shorter period of time, (2) researchers can be sensitized to issues that were overlooked in past research, and (3) more can be learned about an area of study when it is unfamiliar (Belgrave & Smith, 1995; Kingry, Tiedge, & Friedman, 1990). Candor and spontaneity may be enhanced because focus group data are collected in a social setting (Carey & Smith, 1994). Another advantage of using focus groups is that participants' interactions between each other can replace their interaction with the interviewer, resulting in an increased emphasis and focus on participants' points of view (Morgan, 1988). This interaction between participants is useful in providing an opportunity to identify and understand the common language of the group.

To begin the focus group sessions, the study information sheet (Appendix A) and the informed consent form (Appendix B) were reviewed. Following that, an initial question, "Could everyone give an example of a stress they deal with everyday?", was posed to allow everyone to participate with a short answer. This opening question or statement was a way of getting everyone to share their different opinions and experiences before the potential for consensus was reached (Morgan, 1988). More detailed questions followed regarding processes, strategies, and personal experiences.

The researcher utilized a set of guiding research questions during focus group sessions (Appendix F). The guide provided a level of structure to discussions that was valuable for both directing group interaction and for making comparisons across groups during analysis (Morgan, 1988). Following focus group completion, individual interviews were used to verify and expand on the information and ideas provided at the focus group sessions. Individual participants were provided with an opportunity to respond to actual transcript segments from the focus group sessions. This application of two modes of interviewing helped to cross-validate findings. The researcher contacted participants who could provide more information and participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they would like to share more or clarify any information from the focus group session.

Focus Group/Interview Setting

Three senior high schools were contacted and used as sample sites for this study. In the three schools, two CALM (Career and Life Management) classes and one student council group were approached for volunteer participants. One focus group from each class was developed. Focus groups took place in school meeting rooms to ensure there would be no interruptions and privacy for the participants. Unfortunately during one of the lunch-hour focus groups, the school's intercom system interrupted the group session a number of times throughout the hour. The focus group was paused during the announcements and continued following the disruptions.

Two focus groups took place during the students' lunch hour and one focus group took place during class time. The decision of when the focus group would take place was made jointly by the students and their teacher to ensure that the teacher, participants, and the remaining students were not inconvenienced in any way.

Seven participants were called and asked if they would like to take part in a follow up interview (all agreed) and a time was set up that was convenient for each participant. The interviews took place over a speaker-phone. Continued consent was confirmed with each follow-up participant. Telephone interviews were used because they were the most convenient and the least time consuming method for follow-up participants. Focus group sessions and follow-up interviews lasted for approximately one hour.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently throughout the research process (Fetterman, 1989; Morse & Field, 1995). Ethnographic data collection and analysis techniques were used to attain a rounded and comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. Ethnographic analysis is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that assist in explaining the existence of those patterns (Boyle, 1994).

Ethnography's goal of cultural interpretation and understanding is reached when there is enough data to allow the researcher to produce a detailed, coherent, and rich description (Morse & Field, 1995; Fetterman, 1989). Analysis began with coding that is, breaking down the data until the units are small enough to begin analysis. These data units were compared, contrasted, and sorted into larger categories until a discernable thought, behavior, or theme became identifiable (Fetterman, 1989). The themes found in the data were derived from the language and experiences of the participants. Inferences and schemas developed during analysis were modified until understanding occurred (Agar, 1986). Following this synthesis aspect of analysis, the researcher focused on the identified categories and the relationships among them (Wolcott, 1994).

Memos were useful during this time for reviewing the researcher's questions of data fit, ideas, and paths to analysis decisions (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

A cut and paste method was used to manage the data. Exerpts from the transcripts were cut out and placed into envelopes representing identified categories. During data analysis it was important to be able to refer back to the original data and easily sort codes and categories. This was achieved by transcribing each focus group and interview on a different colour of paper and every line of each transcript was numbered to allow the researcher to easily refer back to the original transcript.

Rigor

The central methods for ensuring rigor are closely tied to reliability and validity, more specifically, credibility checks (Morse, 1994). Reliability is the measure of the degree to which random variation may have influenced the result's stability and consistency. Validity is the degree to which the research findings represent reality (Morse & Field, 1995). Credibility refers to "the truth as known, experienced, and or deeply felt by the people being studied and interpreted from the findings with co-participant evidence as the 'real world', or the truth in reality" (Leininger, 1994, p. 105). Credibility can be linked very closely with confirmability, which means "obtaining direct and often repeated affirmations of what the researcher has heard, seen, or experienced with respect to the phenomena under study (Leininger, 1994, p. 105). The focus of and intent of this study effectively addressed the issues of credibility and confirmability because the purpose of the study was to learn about the topic from the participant's point of view. Leininger (1994) asserts that restating ideas or instances to the participants is a way to confirm the ideas throughout the study. This was done throughout the research process. Focus groups built on the ideas of the past focus groups to obtain confirming evidence or new ideas to examine. Follow-up interviews were vital to confirming the participants' previous ideas and statements, and to confirm the interpretations and findings of the researcher. The issue of rigor was also

addressed by confirming with the thesis supervisor the researcher's representation of the participants' perspective, the focus group and interviewing procedures, and during the analysis phase, the researcher conferred with and discussed the process and decisions with the supervisor.

A method used to avoid the potential problem of investigator bias was maintenance of an audit trail. This was completed through use of a journal kept by the researcher to record thoughts, feelings, emotions, 'hunches', decisions, and interpretations. These notes were necessary so that the researcher could reflect on and be aware of how the study is effecting her and how the researcher is effecting the study (reflexivity). This method of reducing investigator bias was also useful in the effort to maintain a nonjudgmental orientation (Fetterman, 1989).

The use of focus groups posed a number of possible threats to validity, which included social desirability and the effect of group participants' opinions on others. These drawbacks were addressed in a number of ways. First, group processes were considered as valid and important data that are illustrative of group dynamics. Second, the researcher recognized that the data collected during the focus group session may represent opinions that are shaped by the group discussion (Carey, 1995). Thirdly, follow-up interviews were used to expand on and confirm the findings from the initial focus group session, which helped to increase the accuracy and validity of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Review

Ethical approval was first acquired from the Health Research Ethics Administration Board at the University of Alberta (Appendix G). In the department of Education the researcher completed a Cooperative Activities Project application form for the Associate Dean of Research. After receiving University approval, the researcher contacted the Central Administration offices for the appropriate school boards to obtain their approval. Following this approval, the principals

and teachers for each involved school were approached for her/his consent to allow their students the opportunity to participate in the study.

Informed Consent

The researcher met with the consenting teacher's students in their classroom to introduce and explain the study. At this time interested students were given information sheets (Appendix A & C) and consent forms (Appendix B & D) for themselves and their parents. Consent from both parents and students allowed the student to become a participant in the study. Consent forms were assessed using the Microsoft Office readability statistics, and were found to not be above grade seven level.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

In order to provide anonymity to all participants a number of steps were taken. First, audiotapes and transcripts were identified by a code that was known only to the researcher and transcriptionist. The code sheet was kept in a locked drawer separate from the data. Second, both transcripts and tapes were identified with codes and all potentially identifying information was altered or removed from the data. Third, taped focus group sessions, interviews and transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet and access was only available to the researcher. Fourth, consent forms will continue to be kept in a separate file cabinet for 5 years after study completion and will be destroyed after this time. Fifth, quotations used from the data were written in a manner that would not identify the participants. In presenting this data, the researcher used pseudonyms and altered identifying information in the quotes to preserve the anonymity of the participants. During the focus group sessions participants were reminded of all member's rights to confidentiality, and respect for each other's opinions and feelings.

Only the researcher, transcriptionist, and thesis supervisor had access to the raw focus group and interview data. All agreed this information would be kept confidential. During the research process if any information was disclosed regarding the potential for harm to self or

others, this was discussed with the participant and thesis supervisor, and if necessary, action was taken. In one case a participant shared information that disclosed the possibility of self-harm. As outlined in the informed consent, this was discussed with the thesis supervisor, a parent of the participant, and the participant. All other information provided by the participant remained confidential.

Disposition of Data

Audiotapes and transcripts will be retained for seven years after study completion. During this time if the researcher or another researcher engages in a secondary analysis, ethical approval will be sought. After seven years, tapes will be destroyed but transcripts will be kept for an indefinite length of time. Participants who requested a copy of the study results were sent a copy.

The researcher plans on publishing the results of this study, preferably in health promotion and adolescent health journals.

Risks and Benefits

Although the benefits of in-depth interviews have been restricted to the opportunity for generating knowledge (Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994), some participants have described gaining a new perspective about their situations and finding the interview to be an empowering and healing process (Morse & Field, 1995). Carey (1995) stated that focus group participants have reported finding focus groups to be enjoyable, supportive, informative, and providing an opportunity for an empowering experience. During this study's follow-up interviews, participants reported that they thought the focus group was "really good." Only one participant mentioned something negative, he explained that that was because he had a lot to do that day. In addition, that same participant stated: "I like to do these things, 'cause I know it's good to get to

the truth of things." Another student responded by saying: "I thought it was great. It made me feel better." The most common explanation for why the focus group was so good was because the participants had an opportunity to learn what other people thought. For example: "I was glad to do it. It was interesting to hear that a lot of people have the same problems…it's interesting to hear the different views of people."

The possible risks of this study included loss of time and the possible resurfacing of unpleasant memories. Participants were compensated for their loss of time with a lunch, provided by the researcher during the focus group sessions.

The findings are presented in the following chapter. The adolescents' own words were used as much as possible. Repeated interjections, such as "Um" and "Like", were deleted from the transcript exerpts when they interrupted the flow of the quote and were not vital to the meaning of the statement.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Being an Adolescent

> You're Luke on a deserted planet, so you kind of feel all alone, and then all of a sudden big things happen to you. All of sudden…there's a princess and there's all these other things, so it's getting a little bit more complicated…then you've got this mentor guy, Obi-Wan, who kind of helps you through the whole thing but then [makes a sound], he's gone, so you've kind of got to wing it by yourself, but luckily you've had all this experience…I guess that's kind of like what life is: it gets complicated all of a sudden, and then all of a sudden you're all by yourself.

This visual and telling image of the adolescent experience was offered by a focus group participant. The group had been asked if there was a movie or song that expressed how they felt about their lives. Like Luke, the coming-of-age hero of the Star Wars movies, this teen was finding life to be suddenly complicated, with "big things" happening. Life was exciting ("there's a princess"), but still one is uneasy, confused and feeling alone. Despite all the experiences and guidance that has been collected in the past, one is now essentially winging it.

"Difficult", "a challenge", "an identity crisis", and "trying to make a difference". These are the words teenagers used to describe adolescence. One participant stated: "[Adolescence is] the point before which you grow up, where you find out who you are…you start questioning who you are and your problems." "It's basically where you decide what direction your life's going to take." A participant shared that adolescence is when you face intense emotions and important decisions about your future. This participant also explained that adolescence is "probably confusion, and wanting to get out of that confusion." These quotes demonstrate the complicated state of being in which many adolescents find themselves. They are questioning who they are and who they want to be and they perceive that the decisions they make now will decide and influence the rest of their lives.

> You don't always show it [stress], but it's always there; you'll always have some form of stress, and it's not easy to see sometimes. But I think everybody in adolescence is going to go through it, and you just kind of have to expect it, and there's varying degrees of it, I think. And how you deal with it is the biggest thing.

Participants explained that they feel that they are constantly facing some type of stress and many of these "everyday" stresses were in the areas of school and relationships. "All we have to focus on is getting out of school and how to do that." "It's the hardest thing right now." "If you don't perform above such a percentage, you're almost looked down upon." Participants described how school and relationships are closely connected. Billy explained: "Relationships are very stressful, and they affect your school a lot too…you sit and worry about like, whether your relationship's gonna work and stuff, and then you…you don't care about your school, and then it just adds up, and your stress gets really stressful." Fran supported this view: "You're worried about relationships and family, and everything else comes above school, and probably school should come above most of the other things."

"It's very hard to be this young and stupid…we're stupid; adolescents are stupid." "We think we can do anything we want, and we just want to see how far we can go before we'll be stopped." This is how some of the participants perceive what being an adolescent is. To illustrate this point more clearly, a participant used the movie; *The Basketball Diaries* to describe what adolescent life is like. This movie is a true story, chronicling the fall from grace of a group of high school friends. These boys went from being all-star basketball players to doing drugs to relieve boredom, and all the way to dealing with serious drug addictions and going to jail for a serious crime. The participant who chose this movie, expanded on her reason for making this choice to illustrate adolescence: "He went through so much, [he] went from being a good kid that was pampered to one that went through it all…they [adolescents] go from something that's little, and they just *take it to the actual limit*, everybody does that."

Adolescents were described by a participant as "not being able to wait for anything…you want to be older, you want to experience everything that older people get to experience." This impatience to be older was a common feeling that participants described as being a big part of adolescence. One participant explained "there's a certain freedom that teenager's have now…but they're still not old enough to…do all the stuff." This need to do more things was supported by another participant: "You don't want to be treated like a kid…it's hard because you wish you were older or something or you were treated like you were older." Participants' need to be older is associated with the "want to get out that [adolescence] confusion" and the answer to "what direction your life is going to take." How adolescents cope with the stresses and circumstances of their life in the meantime, until they are "older", may be the real answer to who they will become.

Everyday Stress

The constant and continuously present "everyday" stresses with which adolescents must deal was the central focus of this study, as opposed to the less frequent but perhaps more intense stresses that occasionally face some adolescents. The perception of the stresses that participants identified as being 'unsolvable' came through during focus groups and interviews. Participants felt that these stresses were always there and were not going away. Some of the participants of this study described the adults in their lives as not understanding what they are going through, what they are feeling, what they want, or what they need.

Participants were asked to give their definition of stress so that a dialogue regarding different types of stress could begin and also to understand the different perspectives of what stress means to youth. The common theme underlying this question was that of *overload*. Mike defined stress as "the frustration or just the general confusion where you don't know what you're doing, and just too much is happening, and it's an overload and just confusion." This overload was described as being difficult to deal with. For example Chris described stress as "too much to handle, something that overwhelms you and you don't know what to do." Billy supported this

"stress is…an overload of your…tolerance level." Chris provided a thoughtful explanation of what stress means for adolescents:

> You don't always show it [stress], but it's always there…you'll always have some form of stress, and it's not easy to see sometimes. But I think everybody in adolescence is going to go through it, and you just…have to expect it, and there's varying degrees of it…and how you deal with it is the biggest thing.

Although during the focus groups and interviews the participants identified numerous stresses, they also explained why stress is not always a bad or harmful force in a person's life. For example, Diane stated that positive stress "gives you important skills, you're able to act under pressure better and faster, more efficiently if you handle your stress the right way." Fran reported "when there's not so much of it [stress]…it does help you to do things better and quicker instead of bringing you down." Some of the respondents explained that stress can help with working harder and better, and stress can be energy to put into something, such as working out. When asked to expand on how stress can be positive, Brent explained what his life would be like if he did not have some stress:

> I know in a stress-free world for me, I would lie in bed all day and not go to school and practically eat anything I want, whenever I want…I'm glad there is stress for that so I don't lie in be all day, and so I actually get something done.

Georgia stated "I think if there wasn't stress a lot of people wouldn't push to do good." The young people in this study are not crumbling under their stresses and they were able to see the positive aspects of stress. This seems to be an important and beneficial attitude because they felt that their stress was not going away and it was not easily solvable.

School: "It's always there"

When participants were asked to identify the everyday stresses with which they felt they must cope, the most common response was school. "It's the hardest thing right now." "Most of my stresses come from the same area, which is school, whether it be marks, council, or sports games, all that." "Yeah, we'll make it through school. That's just the biggest thing." Participants discussed a number of stresses that happen within the school, such as the teachers, lack of time,

marks and classes, feelings of competition, and planning for the future. "Dealing with problems, school, peer pressure, figuring out what you're going to do in your life after high school." "All we have to focus on is getting out of school and how to do that." One participant explained that sometimes other stresses are more important than school. When this happens it results in more school stress because it affects such things as homework and assignments. "School doesn't even matter sometimes...you'll forget about the importance of it for a while, you know, you'll be worried about something else or concentrating on something else and that kind of loses it's importance."

Teachers and Counselors.

> They're out to get you. Like, people, they always say, "My teacher hates me." But in some cases it's true. Like, some teachers they just, they don't like you, and therefore they're not going to help you in anyway. 'Cause I mean, I've had teachers where I'll have an assignment, and it's not done and I say, "I'm going through some stuff here, and it's almost done. Can I hand it in tomorrow?" And they're like, "yeah, sure." And you get other teachers, like Mrs. X over there, you tell her, any of them, that you want to hand it in, and they say, "No. You got a zero. Bye."...they don't try to understand; they don't try to help you.

This lack of understanding was expressed by a number of participants. Rhonda expressed how she feels teachers treat her because she is not a "A+" student:

> If you come into class, no offense, like all happy and perky and you do all your grades and you're an A+ student and that, then they're like, "Yeah, no problem. Have an extension." You come in there like me, you don't do your homework or anything...I've been told to drop out of my classes, and that really ticks me off. Then I just stay in them to piss the teacher off.

The suggestion from teachers to "drop out" was a concern to Billy: "I've been told 'With the marks you have, maybe you should drop out and get a job?' I mean, what kind of help is that? I'm in school, I'm here, I'm learning something; what good is it to kick me out?" Billy also described how he does not understand why teachers kick students out of class if they are late: "[Teachers] kick you out if you're late. I mean, what's that? 'Cause I mean, at least we bothered

to take the time to show up and we're there, and then they kick us out, and then it's our problem and we have to get an excuse."

The attitude of teachers was a concern and stress to some students. Georgia described how sometimes the way teachers act in class can be hurtful: "If you say something that's wrong, they make you feel really stupid, and then you feel bad about it." Jeff explained how he found teachers to be stressful: "sexist teachers, they're…a total pain in the butt. I find most of the teachers in the school…they favour females." During this particular focus group session, participants explained how teachers commonly treat male students unfairly and give female students better marks and more breaks. This gender biased occurrence was supported by both the male and female participants.

Chris felt that teachers don't have enough time to accomplish what they would like and for this reason the participants' work loads, and stress, increased. "They [teachers] don't have enough time in class to do it [course work], so they just cram it on you at night, and they give you all the homework for weekends and …I don't have time for that." A number of the participants expressed concern as to why teachers are not as effective as they could be, and also provided some suggestions on how this situation could be remedied. "If you have a teacher who likes what they're doing and trying to help you…the class is a lot funner and a lot easier than [with] somebody who just does the curriculum and is just there." Neil explained how money may be both the problem and the solution: "There's a lot of the teachers that don't want to put in the extra hours because of the pay. They don't pay them overtime. It's just a set daily rate. That's all they get. So, like, understandably the teachers don't want to put in any extra hours. If teachers made more money, the quality of the school would go way up." Diane shared how she wished teachers would change to help her: "If [teachers] changed to fit your needs…if he could just give extra work sheets out to people that want to gain extra marks somehow, that would work." "I'd change the attitudes of the teachers, because they have a…bad attitude, and they look for you to have a

bad attitude." This was Billy's response when he was asked what he would change to make school less stressful.

Planning and Marks.

"The stress of not knowing what they want to do, that just makes the push to do well even more because they sort of just need good marks for anything, to be prepared for anything." This was Troy's explanation of how not knowing what to do after high school and the need for good marks can be stressful. Georgia described the focus of her Career and Life Management class: "There's a lot of emphasis on knowing what you want to do, and [to] get the marks to go there." Chris explained the importance of marks: "There's a lot of pressure for you to have to do well in school and have to take all the academic courses and do well in them and know what you're doing and not fail any tests or anything." Mike explained the importance of marks for the future:

> Well, another thing is, with the U of A, they're starting scholarships at the Grade 11 year, so it's all on your Grade 11 marks that you'll get a large portion of scholarships, so that's a major concern now, because, well, it's kind of both ways, because if you get Grade 11 scholarships you can't get Grade 12 ones, so you also have to decide, well, am I gonna really push it *this* year, or am I gonna really push it *next* year? And then I need to decide which one.

Rhonda made a statement that described this pressure to think about the future, starting as early as the first year of high school: "In grade 10 you still have to look at the courses you need to get into college, or university…or the rest of your life." Billy explained how he was trying to make these *rest of your life*, decisions while at the same time trying to stay in school:

> I find it really funny that, well, we try and stay in school and you get all your courses. I mean, I've put up with it for like three years, trying everything, and they like, sit and they find ways to tell you to drop out and stuff….The counselors even; it's pretty weird. But you go to them, you try to sort your classes out, and they don't let you, and it gets really stressful 'cause you don't know. I'm trying to graduate right now, and it's a real pain because they want me to graduate the way *they* want me to… "You can take this", you know. Like, I want to take *this*. And they said, "No, you're gonna take *this*."…They're being totally unsupportive. It's crazy.

Not all participants felt that they could worry about university, they had enough to handle in the present. Corey explained: "I'm kind of worried about my marks right now but I'm not too worried about getting into university. I'm not really worried about that right now."

> Sometimes it's [school] not challenging enough in some areas, but challenging too much in physics…I find physics really, really hard. I failed…it was a lot of stress because my teacher would…cancel me out of field trips and stuff so I could stay in class…and it was just a lot of pressure 'cause she'd get mad at me, my teacher.

This quote suggests that sometimes the results of bad grades can be seen as having more ramifications on the present, rather than future plans.

Competition.

The need to compete and the resulting stressful feelings were discussed by some of the participants. Troy tried to explain where the expectations to compete come from: "Parents are there, but almost as a society. Like to go to university you need these strict marks, and it's getting tougher every year, so that's making a bit more competition." The idea that there are limited opportunities was expressed by Mike: "You've always got to be competing for each other or between each other for certain limited resources." "People…are driving and trying hard just [to] get more and you've got to get better." Brent explained how competition affects him: "[I] try to get my grades high enough and keep them high enough so that they compare with other students." "You just feel the need to keep up with everyone else." Mike shared what happens when one doesn't meet the standards of competition: "If you don't perform above such a percentage, you're almost looked down upon."

Time.

[There's] lots of things going on…you have no time to do it all, and you're just so tired you just want to sleep." This was how Corey described her life, she wants to do it all, but feels there is not enough time for her to do this. Diane expressed a similar feeling of wanting to do it all: "My parents think that all there is to it is homework and work, and I won't have time for

friends. I want to have time to do stuff." School appeared to be the first area of participants' lives that suffered because of lack of time, Fran explained: "I don't have enough time for [school]...not with work and friends and everything; I just don't have enough time for it, and my marks are getting really bad." "An assignment that's due...that's going to take a lot of work...but you don't really have the time to work on it." Lee described how she tried to deal with the numerous activities to which she was committed: "Sometimes...I know I have council and I have SADD in one week, and, like, sometimes I go, 'Well, I'll do my homework in social class' or something like that. Like, sometimes you don't have time to do it all." Participants of a focus group session discussed possible solutions to this problem of lack of time. Diane felt that to help teens cope better with stress the following may be useful: "Maybe just to have a time out. Where you...have one block during, not every single week, but one block every so often that use some kind of activities that creates discussion amongst classmates." Neil added: "Or where you could catch up on work that you need to do or relax. Some weeks it's really, really stressful, and you need some kind of relief."

All of the participants of this study were high school students, which explains the emphasis on the school setting as a stress. It should be noted that these findings would probably have had a different focus had participants been adolescents who had dropped out of school, for example. The participants of this study felt that adolescence is a time of confusion that brings with it stress that is unsolvable and not going to go away. The school was described as stressful for a number of reasons. Teachers were not understanding and sometimes "out to get you." There was pressure to get the best marks possible so that participants were prepared for the future. With this stress of getting good marks was the stress of competing with their peers for "limited resources." Rounding out the description of the school setting as stressful is the lack of time experienced by participants. Participants reported that they "want to do it all" but they just don't have time. Participants were trying to balance their school work with the need to spend

time with friends; they were trying to deal with the pressure from parents to stay home; and a number of participants were trying to balance their extracurricular activities with the rest of their busy lives.

Relationships: "Mine don't seem very understanding"

> People have a lot of problems. I guess I could use an example, my brother; he's got like drug problems and family problems and...relationship problems, all that stuff...things just add up and get really depressed...I'm a lot like him in a lot of ways. We have a lot of similarities. But he deals with it a lot harsher than I ever have to.

In this quote from Billy, he described his friend, who he refers to as his brother, as an example of someone who was having difficulty coping with his relationships. Georgia commented on her ideas about the stress of relationships: "Some are frustrating...it depends who you're in a relationship with." When asked what relationships are the most stressful, Mike responded by saying the following:

> Well, the family ones are for sure. For any of you who have known my mother, who is a substitute teacher, yeah, that's probably the greatest stress in my life. I don't know, I haven't had a girlfriend in ages; doesn't bother me, I think, you know. So according to my mother, I won't have a girlfriend till I'm twenty-four, I think it was. [laughter]. See, that's not really even a concern for my self, but the family ones sure are one of the most stressful relationships, because you have to live with them more than half the day, so just that amount of exposure.

Rhonda replied of family relationships: "that one really bites." Regarding intimate relationships, Lee stated that these are stressful parts of life even before the relationships are developed: "Peer pressure... everyone [says] 'we've got a boyfriend' or 'where are you going to find one? Do you have any idea?'"

Parents and Family.

> Things really add up. Like, my family life, all my family, they want me to be part of the family, and that just doesn't work because I can't stand any of them. It's, well, it's just, I'm so different from them all, 'cause they like to get around the piano and sing and stuff, and I don't know, I don't tend to like doing that very much. But I mean, I get the stress from them, and then it adds on to the school

> and then to your relationships. I mean, it just kind of all adds up, and, yeah, it's very stressful.

That was a statement from Billy, describing how his family life is stressful. Unlike Billy, Fran described how she would like to be a part of her family and how this can be stressful:

> [Dealing with the problem] just makes the fight worse, we really just don't want to talk to each other, and I like to have a strong family bond there, be happy with my family and to come home and know that things are okay. But when we fight it always makes it worse, and you can't do that, you know? I want to have a strong relationship with my family…but it was really bad there for a while.

The difficulty of being part of the family was described by a follow-up interview participant, who shared what he thinks is wrong with his family:

> They want me to be like maybe eight years old again. Like, they've never told me that, but I know that's what they expect. But there's a difference between reading their minds and stuff, but…they've told me, "You know, you used to be such a good little boy." The whole family, they're kind of slightly immature, because they spend their whole time at home and just like being a little family, and they're there together, and they've never been outside to like see the real- see what people are like, all over.

Jeff described why he finds his family to cause stress: "Family. Like, going home we get nagged at by our parents or getting bugged by our little sisters or brothers or as the case may be." Getting *nagged* by parents was also something that bothered Diane:

> Sometimes parents they'll harass you, they think that you don't have priorities and that you don't have things important to you. So they keep nagging at you like you're three years old…My parents think that all there is to it is homework and work, and I won't have time for my friends…they always want me to stay home …I hate that.

"Mine [parents] don't seem very understanding." Not understanding what was important to participants or appreciating their interests was reported by some of the participants. Billy provided an explanation:

> My parents,…they've let it [be] known to me that they don't like the music I listen to, the people I hang out with sometimes, and parties I go to every once in a while. I get respect from my parents because they pretty much leave me alone, though they always let it known to me that they…wish I'd come to church and be

> their little boy and part of the family, 'cause we have a very, my parents, they built up a very strong family life, but no outside life. But I have kind of a strong a social life outside of the house, and my parents, they kind of push me away for that reason; they exclude me. Like, they ask me to be included and stuff, but they really make me feel the opposite. That's pretty stressful too.

Another explanation was given that described why parents don't understand some of the things that participants report teens are going through, and how this lack of understanding is stressful for them:

> If I told my parents [what I do] to deal with my stresses, you know, just to make things easier while I try to find out who I am. I've drank a lot, I've smoked a lot of dope, I've started smoking, you know, I listen to really crazy music (but I always have listened to crazy music), I've neglected my schoolwork and just tried to figure out who I am. But my parents would just look at that as crazy. They'd say, "Well, just go see the doctor." My parents have never gone through this type of thing or had like, suicidal moments in their life when they're really depressed, and they just don't really care about anything else; they just want to be happy, so they would just think that there's something wrong with me, that I need to get help and get more pills and stuff. 'Cause my brother was on Prozac, and I'm on Prozac now, but my parents would think, "Well, if you do things like that, you must need a higher dosage or something." Like there was something mentally wrong with me. There is, but they'd look at it in a much more serious note.

When this participant was asked if his parents know about his "suicidal moments", his response was: "I think…that would probably be a lot more stressful for me if they did know." It appears that parents are being perceived as not understanding, but at the same time the participants were not sharing the information that they would like understood.

"My family stress is my dad…He's just an ass about everything." This is how Lee described her family stress. Fathers were described by a number of participants as being a stress in their lives. Brent explained:

> My father used to be a big source of stress, but now it's stress in a different way because he works in the States, in the U.S., for three weeks out of four in a month, so he's home maybe one week at a time. And it's stress in a way that I never get to see him, but the old stress was that I saw too much of him and he would ask too much of me. And like I said, it's a different kind of stress, but in a way it still is stress.

Georgia shared how the absence of her father was a stress for her: "I lost most of the stress from my family when my mom kicked my brother out…and the only stress I get from family is pressure from my dad to go do things with him, 'cause he doesn't live with us anymore." Rhonda described how her home life had become stressful: "Well, my parents just got divorced. My dad moved out a year ago."

The topic of "blame" was brought up by some of the participants when they were discussing parents, and how they can be a stress. Billy explained:

> [Parents] look for things they can blame on you…my mom would say, "I'm really depressed because I never get to talk to you anymore."…they try to blame all their depression on me because they say they don't see me enough, and they feel like they're losing their kids and stuff, and that's really stressful too because then it just makes me want to leave, and I mean, I'm home probably for six hours a night to sleep, and that's about it.

Rhonda shared her experience with this stress: "That's so like parents, guilt trips…I got blamed for my parents' divorce." Fran had a similar situation in her family that she described:

> My dad gets really bad sometimes. Like, I guess he sometimes drinks too much. And then the other day he got really drunk, and told me that I was the reason for all the problems in his life. That didn't feel very good [laughs].

Billy explained how he felt when his parents blamed him for not being a good role model for his siblings: "They say 'why can't you? You set a bad example for your brothers and sisters.' And basically they tell me I'm the bad seed of the family."

Pressures and Expectations.

"I think math is hard if your parents don't understand. If they've always been good in school or something and you can't deal with a subject and there's a lot of pressure for you to have to do well in school." This pressure to get good marks in school was seen as a common pressure that parents put on participants. Jeff explained how his mother reacted to marks that he felt were more than acceptable:

> I'll come home with my report card and let's say I have a core average of 75 or 76. At school my friends will be like "whoa, man, you're smart." And I'll get home and my mom…[says] "What's this? You can do so much better than this."

> It's like, "What the hell," you know...I think if the majority of my friends brought that home to their parents, their parents would be giving them money and stuff.

Lee explained how she had difficulty meeting the expectations of her father: "I can never live up to [my parents], his [father] standards...I'm supposed to be an engineer when I get out of school...I'm supposed to have like a ninety average, other than that I'm not going to make it." Achieving what her parents expect of her was also expressed as a stress by Chris:

> Keeping good grades and stuff like that for my parents...My parents push me to be good and excel in sports...I always get the university lecture: "Well, you have to do this or this, you know. You've got to keep pushing yourself and be even better, you know"...They say it's my decision whatever I do, and I see that, but it's like there's an underpressure...one that they don't show but it's there.

Expectations to be a part of the family or part of the group they had moved away from were a stress, according to participants. Fran explained how she couldn't live up to these expectations: "My parents expect stuff out of me, and they want me to be a part of the family, but I'm never home to be there." Billy shared his feelings about the pressure that his family and friends put on him to be involved in the church, and how he feels more alone when he does join in with this group of people:

> I get people from my church coming over to my house in the morning and saying, "Come to church with us, come to church with us," and there's all that pressure...'cause they're all my friends, they're bugging me and saying, "Come to church, come to church" and my family try to get me to come to church and say that if I came to church, then I'd be a lot happier....It's like, I go to church and I see all these people that are like so good and so *perfect*, and they expect me to be the same. And I go there, and I feel like I'm by myself and like nobody likes me because I'm so different, 'cause I mean, they're all dressed up nice, and I just go like this. So I don't know.

The expectation to be perfect was a common view held by many participants. When Fran was asked to clarify what "perfect" meant to her parents, she replied: "Good grades, good job, good everything." Carrie explained how she felt her parents put pressure on her: "My family expects me to be perfect; I *have* to be perfect." Billy stated: "I hate it when they compare you [to them], because my whole family is just *perfect*." Fran responded to this comment by asserting: "I

just don't like being told that I should be perfect, 'cause *nobody* is perfect." Billy was asked to expand on why he felt that his family was perfect and what that meant to him:

> [My family is] always happy; they always have no real worries. They've always got like things that they're doing. I'm not sure exactly. My parents, they treat my little brothers and sisters... like they are the perfect little children; you know our family is beautiful, and they try to make them feel safe at home. And I don't know, I guess I just disagree with that because they're going to make them feel safe at home, and then when they're going to go into the real world, and they get smacked in the face with how life really is... I think it's a bad thing [treating family as if it was perfect], because right now their lives are perfect. They're going to school, they're happy, they come home, they work, they have a hot meal, they watch movies together and play the piano and stuff... I guess to them that is perfect... they're all perfectly happy... I wish I was perfectly happy, and I think that would be... awesome if I was, but I think that that view of perfection for them is, I think it's wrong, because one day they're going to wake up one day and see that the world isn't like all smiles and chuckles, hot meals and being around the piano, being with your parents.

Rhonda made a statement after Billy's description that expressed her desire for her family to be more like Billy's "perfect" family:

> At least you see perfect. You should see my family! My brothers come home, chuck everything all over the place, start screaming at my mom. My mom comes home, starts screaming at us. I come home, I start screaming. That's all that happens in my house, is fighting, ever.

Perfection was not an expectation that participants felt they could "live up to" and they also felt that it wasn't a fair expectation of anyone.

Friends.

Even though participants explained that they wanted to be able to spend time with their friends without being *nagged* by their parents, participants felt that friends can sometimes be an additional source of stress. Rhonda told how her friends' problems can be a stress for herself:

> Hearing my friends' problems, it stresses me out so bad, 'cause then I feel obligated to try and help them with their stress, and then it just piles on top and then finally the other day I just told everybody, "don't tell me about your problems. I don't care. I don't want to deal with it." And they got mad at me, but I don't care, 'cause I don't need anymore stress; don't talk to me. I don't want to hear it.

Chris also found her friends' stressful situations to affect her own stress:

> Friends...they can be a big stress factor too if your friend's going through something really big....Something's happening in your friends' lives, it's, I don't know, it's negative or something like that, it's a lot of stress on you too because some of my friends are going through...really tough times, like their parents, one of my friends, her mom committed suicide, and her dad left her kind of an orphan with her aunt. She's one of my good friends. And some of my other friends just go through rough times with their parents because one of my other best friends, her dad was killed. And so just like little things like that. And then you'll be at a party or something, and it'll just come up when you're talking with somebody, and it's just, it's hard to cope with some things sometimes because they'll be really stressed out or something about a boyfriend or about just life in general, and then a lot of other things in their life will start falling apart too. And then you try and help them, but it kind of depresses you to a point too, and you're really, you're kind of, you don't know what to do.

This quote, from Chris, explained that not only does hearing about their friends' problems cause participants stress but also feeling unable to make things better for their friends is stress inducing.

Boyfriends and Girlfriends.

Having a relationship with members of the opposite sex was seen as a stress to many of the participants. This stress often started before a relationship even began. Some participants explained that decisions involved with a relationship are stressful, Diane explained:

> Deciding if you want a relationship, what you want from it and how much you are willing to devote or commit...and if it all really works out in the end, 'cause I mean, here in high school, how long does it last for really.

Mike stated that people need to decide "how much time you want to put into it [relationship]." Chris reflected this in her statement about having a relationship with someone older: "They expect too much of a commitment for a relationship, and I'm young and I want to have fun, and I don't want to worry about that yet." Billy shared how his past experiences with girlfriends have made him question whether or not he wants to try again: "I want to get into a relationship, but it's...kind of scary 'cause you get...worried that it's going to happen again...That can be stressful if you don't know what to do, if you should see somebody or not, being lonely and stuff." Lee explained how peers can add to the pressure of deciding if one wants to enter a relationship or

not: "Peer pressure... everyone [says] 'we've got a boyfriend' or 'where are you going to find one? Do you have any idea?'"

Jeff attempted to explain a past relationship: "I found a relationship with a girl gave me a lot of stress. I don't know even how or what anyway, but I know it, I just found it gave me a lot of stress." Billy had more specific ideas about what went wrong with his relationship and explained what he would have wanted to happen differently:

> I think the major turning point was probably my last relationship, so if it had gone better for me, I think if she had been more understanding... 'cause I guess she like, lied to me, to break up with me. Like, she said it was someone else's idea; like, she said her counselor told her it was a good idea to part, instead of just telling me that she thought it was a good idea, so that was very hard on me. And I think if I could have changed something, it probably would have been that whole like, last half of that relationship.

When asked about relationships Chris stated: "Boyfriends...some of them stress you out completely." Billy provided a description of why relationships can be stressful for teenagers:

> A lot of [adolescents] don't really have an idea about what a relationship is really like, and a lot of times they really take advantage of the person...teenagers don't really treat the significant other with...respect a lot of the time...You have to be respectful, and you have to look out for the other person's...interests and well-being, and...not just yourself.

Sex

During follow-up interviews some participants were asked to clarify why they said relationships were stressful, as some participants were reluctant to go into too much detail during focus groups. Billy shared his thoughts on the topic of sex:

> Yeah [sex] can be a stress, 'cause a lot of people I know they'll have sex; they'll sleep together, but then that's like all they'll do. That's happened to one of my relationships. That's all it turns into. That's all it turned into for the girls I was with, and she said that's all it seemed like we ever did, and I was always depressed, and so it seemed like it meant nothing. I think sex can be very stressful because people they decide whether or not they want to, and a lot of the time it's a wrong decision because one person wants to, but they don't have the respect to wait and see if the other person is ready. So I think...sex can be a big stress because...especially with guys, 'cause guys are all sexist pigs, all they want from chicks. I don't have a high opinion of like, guys and sex. I think guys are assholes in that way, so pardon my French. I don't know, I think sex is a big

> stress because…all guys want it, and a lot of chicks don't want to because guys are like that. All they want is sex, and then when something they think is better comes along they say "Bye", but than can be very stressful on chicks.

The topic of being responsible in the areas of birth control and sexually transmitted disease protection was brought up by Fran:

> Girls don't want to take birth control 'cause they don't want their moms to find out, and a lot of them don't want to buy condoms 'cause that's way too embarrassing…[Boys aren't responsible] because they feel they don't need to…I think as we get older…you start thinking about what could happen to you more, and you can go out and be responsible, but it is the younger girls…a lot of them are having sex, and they just, they don't want to be seen buying that kind of stuff, so they don't. And they don't use protection [even though] they're risking so much.

The problems with relationships and possible ways to help adolescents were presented in the following statement.

> [Relationships are] moving too quickly for people, and they can't handle it. Sex is coming into it way too much, and it just moves too quickly…Really young girls are going and doing things that they just can't handle at such a young age, and …everything puts stress on a relationship, and if you're in a long-term relationship like me and [my ex] were, it's so much stress that it kind of takes over your life, and that's why we broke up. And during that time…we were just under so much stress from breaking up…"I think…they [should] educate you on sex and the body parts and all that stuff, but they don't educate you on the fact of what it will do to a relationship at such a young age and what it can do to yourself at such a young age…there needs to be more education on that kind of stuff.

Fran explained that she thought more information on aspects of relationships, in addition to the physical aspects, should be provided to help adolescents deal with the everyday stresses that may be a result of relationships.

<u>Search for Identity: "Who am I?"</u>

> I think it just gives you an identity. Some people are beautiful. Some are smart. Some are athletic. When you're none of those things, what else is there to do other than be a party animal…You need to be known as something.

This *need to be known as something* was explained by Diane and was supported by Billy and Fran, respectively:

> An identity...it's important to me. I'm still trying to figure out...how I'd like to get it or what kind of identity I'd like to have...I'd like to be happy being me...just kind of find out who I am, what I enjoy doing, who I think I am.
>
> Building an identity is very important, to know who you are...so that your friends know. To have honest relationships throughout your life, you have to know who you are.

Finding out who they are was not a process that participants felt they would go through alone; other people were seen as important to this search for identity. "[The way] I see myself...depends on [how] I see other people react to me...what others see affects how you're going to be in life 'cause you can't really live just by yourself." "Identifying for other people is important...how can you feel good about yourself knowing nobody likes you?" "An identity that other people see, you also see yourself in that way too, and those qualities become important for you to expand on." Billy explained how his parents were unsupportive and a source of stress during his attempts to build an identity:

> If [parents] would...just let you do things the way you wanted to, it would be easier...if they would just accept who we are and not try and change us into someone that they want us to be...whether they like it or not, that's what I want to do...if [parents] would just accept who we are...and not try and change us into someone that they want us to be...they wouldn't support...my dreams at all, and basically I just fried all my dreams...I don't have dreams anymore.

A number of participants described adolescents as doing *wild* or *stupid* things when they were trying to figure out who they are. Billy explained how his parents would agree with this: "Well, my parents look at things like drugs or alcohol or like bad music, as they put it, the stuff I like and basically the things I like to do [as psycho]." The reason for some of these behaviours was explained by Mike: "People are trying to find something that they can kind of relate to, and some of them are really far out...[adolescence is] the time...to do some wild stuff." Chris tried to make sense of these *wild* activities:

> I think they're learning, and I think they want to see how far they can go before something happens...it even seems like you don't think about it...it feels like you're invincible...Nothing's ever [going to] hurt you...your parents over protect you 'cause they know what goes on...we do so much because we don't

> care…we think we can do anything we want, and we just want to see how far we can go before we'll be stopped…see what our boundaries are.

"You want to experience everything that the older people get to experience." This was Fran's explanation of adolescents *going to the limit*. The hypocriticalness of these actions was recognized by Chris: "Some [adolescents], they just do…things that would actually prove that [they're] too young…stupid things, whether it be…anything that your parents wouldn't approve of…and then it kind of shows that you're not ready to grow up."

Being Different.

"I feel like I'm by myself and…nobody likes me because I'm so different." This feeling of being alone and not being accepted for who you are was expressed by Billy. Rhonda also explained how she feels about not being accepted because of being overweight:

> You can't even do anything about it when you're like that. When people make fun of you…it kills. You go home and cry, and that's all you can do, 'cause you can't all of a sudden one day snap your fingers and be thin and gorgeous. You can't be Cindy Crawford or whatever, overnight.

The following statements are pieces of a focus group in which participants discussed the pros and cons of being different:

> It's a good thing [being different] but you can really get hacked on for it. You are stressed. Like, you love being an individual, you're responsible, I'm an individual, blah-blah-blah, and then all of a sudden you like are put down for being your own person. Everybody's like, 'Be your own person, be your own person.' You become your own person, and then like-
>
> -They look at you and try to see who you're trying to be like. They don't think you're being yourself. They think, well, you're trying to be like this [other] person.

This idea of trying to be someone else and not "being yourself" was expanded on by Billy:

> Anytime I try to do something new or different, just try and…be different…not like *act* different…people look at that and they say, 'no, that's not you', and I always thought that was funny [because] if I don't know who I am, how could they?

Participants explained how adolescents commonly refer to peers who are *acting* different. As Billy stated, sometimes adolescents will simply question the actions of others but as one focus group explained, sometimes the reactions of adolescents can be quite severe:

> They saw someone, this really cool chick…she paints her face up and stuff, and everybody just immediately hates her because she's different. She's friends with us, and she just, she's used to hating everybody because nobody would even try to understand her.
>
> And so she got the crap beat out of her.
>
> By guys.
>
> There were like nine, ten guys that just started beating her up, and they peed on her and everything.

Following this discussion of how a new girl was treated, participants of this focus group discussed how they, themselves, acted towards another student. This student was referred to as "Gremlin" by the participants. This was explained and justified by some of the participants: "But see, the thing is, she really does look like a gremlin; she really does," "See, that just shows, I mean, that's what we're like. That's how immature we are. That's how we've progressed. You know, someone gets known like that, and someone" "-is different. As soon as someone's different we get scared and we start knocking them down for it," "People say that stuff about us, you know. I'm not justifying it, 'cause I mean, it's bad that we say that."

Some participants explained that they would like to be part of group, such as Rhonda who shared how she felt when she didn't *fit in*: "It is so much stress [because] you can't be part of the group." Other participants described why they don't want to be identified with a group. Mike explained how he was concerned with the future ramifications of being seen as part of one group: "Fitting into a group…would make sense…[but] what I'm worried about is if you're forced into it now, you're forced into it later." Fran stated "I wouldn't want to be part of a certain group." She explained that she liked having friends in all the different groups and enjoyed not being labeled as

one of them. Fran agreed that this was her way of being different. The importance of appearance for those adolescents who are trying to be different, and for those who are trying to fit in, was described effectively by participants. Mike provided a statement which explains how this awareness of looks can be stressful for adolescents: "Appearances are everything…people are watching you a hundred percent of the time…you just have to realize that everybody's watching."

The Future.

While adolescents are trying to decide how to look and act they are also trying to make decisions about their future life. Fran stated: "The future is a big worry for everybody right now." Billy explained how he finds the future stressful:

> There's a lot of pressure from…your parents and even your peers…just everybody to grow up and to find out who you are…there's a lot of pressure when you're an adolescent to find out who you are, get a job, and just find your place in life.

The importance and stress of these decisions are reflected in two participants statements: "[It's] for the rest of you life" and "It's stressful if you don't know what to do". Mike explained that adolescence is when teens face intense emotions and important decisions about the future:

> [Adolescence is] basically where you decide what direction your life's going to take. The little decisions you make now will have such big ramifications…I really have to change because I'm going to be an adult in a couple of years. That's what I am for the rest of my life. So we have to grow up really quickly during these couple of years, and it's hard to get the experience and all the information that we need to do that.

There were two participants in this study who explained that they were not stressed about the future. They were more concerned about their life now, in the present. This concern appeared to be influenced by both of the participants' difficulties at home. The following statements support this lack of concern for the future: "I'm not worried about the future; I'm worried about seeing tomorrow…I just care about…finally being independent, being a man." "I don't care [about the future]; I take it day by day…All I care about is getting out of my house,

moving out, getting an apartment…I care about the close future. I don't care about school so much in the future; it's just making something of myself, like actually having a career or something, not working at [a car wash] the rest of my life." Rhonda seemed to believe that the future would be better and time would solve her problems, especially at home: "When I moved out and I was staying with my friends and my mom and I got to see each other like, once a week or whatever, we got along like, great! So I can't wait 'til I move out. We'll go shopping once a week or whatever, and we'll have like the best relationship."

A number of participants explained that the future was something to look forward to and it meant that they would be closer to getting where they want to go and who they want to be. Neil explained that even though he was stressed about the future, this was a good thing: "That's what pushes you to do well in school." School was often referred to as essential to the participants' future success: "[That's] why we're going to university is to achieve what we want to get." "[I have] to get into university, [I have] to get a good job." Georgia shared her feelings on the importance of school and how it is affecting those who can't get the education they need: "To get a job now you need education, but they keep raising the [standards] so less people get the education they need, which is pushing people farther down."

Many of the participants were hesitant and worried about the future. Fran explained her worries: "I worry about the future, because…I want to know where I'm going to be in 10 years…the way people are now, my kids are [going to] have the worst life, because no one [will] be able to get a job. The standards are [going to] be so high; money is going to be a big problem." Corey also stated that she was worried about her future children's lives and money: "Worrying about…costs or…college and stuff and if you have kids, what kind of lives are they [going to] have?" The question "If you had a magic wand and could make changes in you life, what would they be?" was posed to participants. The answers reflected the worry and anticipation that some participants feel about the future. Brent answered:

> I'd like to be up and moved out with, you know, enough money and enough resources to sustain myself, you know, and have a good job, have…some form of job security to know that I'll have that job for a good long time, and I don't have to worry about what's gonna happen tomorrow. Am I gonna get laid off tomorrow? And just have my life settle in a routine.

After this comment was made Lee made a statement that explained that not all participants saw the future as stress free and the answer to their present problems: "I'd want to resort back to when I was little, like two and three, when you didn't have any worries, had no problems."

As participants described the everyday stresses they face, they explored the problems, stresses, challenges and decisions they must deal with in order to figure out: Who am I? Follow-up interview participants were asked when they thought they would know if they had built their identity or when they would know who they are. Neil said he would know his identity was built when he retired because he wouldn't "have to worry about anything any more." Billy explained:

> I think I would know that I found out who I am when I could wake up in the morning and be happy, be in a good mood, and to not wake up and be…happy for five minutes and then remember my problems and remember…things that make me sad, and [being] independent, being able to take care of myself without the help of others.

Mike chose a time when he would be able to reflect, as the moment when he will know his identity is formed:

> When I die, 'cause until that point there's always things that you're second guessing, and because if you keep listening there's going to be parts changing about you; you're going to change everything with each new experience. I don't think it's the end when there's nothing more in the future, and the only the only thing you can do is look back. Just right then you're going to realize; well I'm dying and look what my life has done.

Chris expressed the idea of identity as a process:

> I don't think you ever are totally grown up; I think you always learn as you're growing up, and I think your identity just grows with you. I think you have it when you're born, and you just build to it. You add all your knowledge and all your experiences too; it kind of becomes who you are.

Everyday stress is a factor in all adolescents' lives. For the participants in this study such everyday stress originated out of three main areas: school, relationships, and the search for

identity. Although these areas are categorized separately, they all relate to each other and influence each other. How adolescents cope with the events or situations that they perceive as stressful is the next area to be explored.

Coping: "Deal with It"

> A state of mind...new ways to just keep yourself occupied, keep yourself from...being lonely or depressed; finding ways to get away from your problem without the suicide and without the drugs and stuff...find new ways to relax.

This definition of coping expresses a number of functions of coping; to control feelings; to get away from stress; a state of mind; and ways to relax. The participants in this study provided an abundance of information about how they cope with the everyday stresses in their lives. Some participants were dealing with feelings of loneliness, depression, being out of control, anger, and a variety of mixed emotions. The feelings and emotions were often seen as more stressful than the actual stress and appeared to be confronted first, before the actual problem or causal situation. This was explained when a participant described what coping means for adolescents: "A way to deal with it and to relieve yourself of the stress so you don't feel the anxiety of it and to feel more comfortable." The idea of being comfortable is important and appears for many, to be a pre-requisite to any additional actions towards the initial source of stress. Mike stated that coping is

> not letting the stress get to you...just continuing on no matter if you're in a high-stress situation or low-stress situation...not letting any...obstacles really get in your way.

Participants' description of methods of coping that they use the most and find the most effective seemed to fall into three main categories. First, *escape*, this method was explained as being useful for dealing with the emotional aspects of stresses. Second, *grin and bear it*, this is described as necessary for dealing with those stresses that can not be changed. Lastly, *knowing someone is there*, was expressed as being extremely useful for coping because it lets individuals know they are not alone and that they have someone to talk about their stress so as not to keep it inside.

Escape

Escape or getting away from stress was the most common method used to deal with stress. It includes such things as being able to do what you want for a while, being by yourself to think, and using substances, like alcohol. Getting away or escaping from stressors was stated as being helpful because you don't have to think about the stress for a while. Georgia explained, "you can come back with a clear thought…a balanced thought." Carrie explained why she finds escape useful:

> You have…release from it and you just forget…you have…a little escape from it…You just go and take a deep breath, "Okay, let's try this again", and you just try and work yourself through it.

For some, then, escape is a time to pause, a way of letting go of the worry for a while. It's a way of getting distance from the problem or situation. Getting away, according to the participants, could be just sitting and watching TV. Corey and Georgia described why they thought escape could be beneficial: "you have a release from it and you just forget about it" and "I think getting away and doing something that you like to do, that makes you feel better, because then when you come back the pressures [are] not as much 'cause you've just been relaxed by something you like to do." Brent described what he needed to do to cope sometimes: "I find I just have to retreat into my little world…I focus in on something else."

Other participants explained that escape was more like a flight from trouble. "I leave." "I try not to deal with it." "I don't go home." "I hide in my room." Billy said, "I'd like to just leave it all behind and just forget it." Chris explained why she escapes stresses: "It's hard to explain things so I just avoid them." Chris gave the example of her boyfriend putting a lot of pressure on her to get what he wants. Rather than try to make him understand what she wants, she finds it easier to avoid the situation and hope it goes away. Mike, too, explained: "If you just leave it alone, most of it [stress] will go away." Neil was clear that he did not find this kind of coping useful: "I'm still always worried about it [stress]; what I have to do." Rhonda shared how

her escape methods are not always helpful: "I scream and scream and scream, kick and punch holes in the wall, and then I leave and I feel better. And then I come home and I get screamed at…I'll come back home, and it's still there. It's like, 'go away?' Like, you can't do anything to stop it. She [mother] doesn't shut up." Billy also explained that escaping is okay for a while, but it is not a long-term way to cope:

> It's kind of catching up to me now 'cause for…a long time you just kind of put it behind you and just don't think about it and just forget about it, and it really catches up with you.

The word, *escape*, has a number of meanings, which include "to get away from confinement or restraint"; "to avoid capture, punishment, or any threatened evil"; "to slip away"; "fade"; or "elude" (Random House, 1995). Participants spoke of wanting to avoid the "threatening evil" of the unpleasant, painful feelings that stress caused. Escape could also serve as a way to "elude" observers or slip away for a while so that they can deal with or come to terms with their feelings alone. Being alone was an important and common coping mechanism for a number of participants. Chris said that sometimes to cope "I'll do sports by myself, or I'll just not, I'll totally pull myself away from everybody, and I'll just be by myself for a while." Another participant, Georgia, explained: "sometimes you just need time to yourself…[to] think about everything and …remember it all." Matt told why he liked to get away: "You get to do what you want to do. Nobody's controlling you."

"Escape from life with alcohol and drugs and stuff" was an answer provided to the question on the participant questionnaire: "What do you do for fun?" This comment was explored with the respondent during a follow-up interview:

> If I can drink, I'll drink. If I can do drugs or something, then I will. It just get my mind off the stress….[it] changes my frame of mind. It makes me think in a different way…my mind doesn't sit and think and make me depressed….I just find the cheapest way out and go for it.

This same teenager elaborated on why he thought some adolescents use drugs and alcohol:

> [adolescents'] they'll use [drugs and alcohol]...at a party...to kick back and have a good time, just laugh at other people that are getting drunk and messed up and stuff. But...a lot of kids, they like it and so they do it more and more and more, and then they look for the better high and the better way to get away and stuff.

Drugs and alcohol were described as vehicles for getting away and forgetting about problems: "It's not the best thing you can do, but it's the only outlet I've found." Chris explained what happened to some of her friends in their effort to escape: "They got into like really serious drugs and stuff and always running away, don't care about anything anymore and don't talk to their friends."

Stress was not the only thing adolescents try to escape from, through drugs and alcohol. "Boredom" was another reason to "get high" or drunk. Billy explained:

> I'd say all of the teenagers in this town, minus like forty or fifty, have all either smoked drugs or do smoke drugs on a regular basis because there's nothing else to do, and things aren't as boring when you're fried out of your mind.

Rhonda explained how being "fried" makes things less boring: "When you're fried you can just make a fool of yourself and everybody thinks it's funny and fun." Diane explained that some adolescents aren't only drinking at parties, they are drinking at other times and places to relieve the boredom that they face: "More people are starting to drink at school...[they] just come to school drunk and everything's fun." Neil explained why these adolescents need to escape the boredom: "They just can't do well in school and it's boring, and it's like torture being there."

One participant believed that a lot of youth have trouble with suicide and find it to be a big stress. "It's an easy way out...you don't have to deal with problems...it's the one thing that you always know you can fall back on." Suicide, by the teen participants, was recognized as a means of final escape. This was illustrated in answers to the question of whether or not participants knew of peers who perhaps weren't coping as well as they were: "[We know] some who committed suicide." "I know people who have tried." "Yeah, I do too. They are still trying." "It's a way." One of the study participants discussed how he was attempting to find other ways to escape because he knew he did not want to take the "easy way out":

> Just being around my friends and finding things to do makes it easier to cope…A lot of the times drugs and alcohol make it worse, like especially for me…when I'd take drugs and alcohol, I'd just get more depressed and get really messed up and hurt myself. So I've learned control over that…it'll still happen once in a while, but I've got more control over it, and a lot of my friends have learned to like, help me through all that…***you can't get through it by yourself. You have to have someone there to say, "It's okay."***

Knowing Someone is There

Having someone to talk to was identified as a core method of coping for adolescents. Talking does not automatically imply that the person listening needs to talk. Sometimes it is enough to have the person listen and be accepting of what the person is trying to say. An important element of this method of coping is knowing that someone is there. Carrie explained why this is important for her: "Just being there, knowing that…they're always just going to be there…knowing they are going to support you." Troy stated: "I find knowing they're there is sometimes just enough rather than having to talk…I think with people our age one of the most effective things is just to keep letting them know there's someone there." Brent also commented on the idea of not having to find a solution to the problem : "I find just talking to someone, not necessarily finding the answers, is the best thing."

"I like to know what they [friends] think, if the way I feel is…the way they would feel, if they understand the way I'm feeling, 'cause…sometimes I get really secluded….The fact that somebody else has gone through it…and they tell you what they've learned from it" is helpful for coping, according to Chris. "Finding somebody that had stresses and finding out how they coped with [them] and then talking to each other about how to avoid that stress or how to solve it, if, it can be solved" is how Mike described people, who have been "in his shoes", can help him with his stress. Parents were not seen as helpful in this way: "my parents have never gone through this type of thing or had…suicidal moments in their life when they were really depressed." Some participants felt that their parents have not experienced what they are dealing with and, if they

had, they probably don't remember. This may explain why participants wanted parents to *be there* for them but reported talking to other people when they needed someone to talk to.

> I talk to him and he made me feel good about myself...made me feel like I was a person....He tries to talk to me. He says, "Hey, you know, you're your own person. Be yourself no matter what other people say. Or like, "Don't worry about making other people happy; just concentrate on making yourself happy" and stuff like that. He's a big help, he's really good....if I find someone to talk to, it'll make me feel better.

This is how one counselor was helpful to a participant, when he needed someone to talk to about his feelings of depression and loneliness, and his "suicidal moments." Fran explained how her counselor helped: "She listened...I think that's what more people need is somebody that'll just sit and listen." Although, not all participants felt that counselors were helpful. Rhonda stated: "I won't ask a counselor to help me. I just don't trust, really, anyone." Billy also felt that the in-school counselors were not helpful:

> I find the counselors hard to talk to, because you see them everyday, they see you everyday, and I mean, you up and tell them, 'Hi, I'm a psycho. Help me, please.'...And it's just, it's embarrassing...every time they walk past, you know, they'll be thinking about what you told them, and you know, it's just, you put it off because I've got no one to tell it to.

For this reason Billy went to a counselor outside of the school; he didn't have to see that person in the school hallways everyday.

Having someone who will listen is helpful, according to Lee, because "it's just good to let it out. It feels good having someone to talk to and know they're not going to blab to the world." Mike also explained how talking helps:

> It's people that I can talk to without having to worry about it coming back to me...just to get it out there, because when it's inside, you have all these emotions, but when you actually have to think about speaking them, you kind of have to rationalize it as well.

These statements reflect on the importance of trust. Participants explained that they need to know that they won't be judged for what they share, and that the things they said won't be used against them. Lee described what she thought characterized a good listener: "Someone who really does

listen...you ask them questions, they'll give you honest answers; and someone who's trustworthy and who cares about what you're talking about." Carrie stated "they're just there for you, and...they listen, and then they'll just help you out." Chris explained how her friends help when she is coping with stress and what makes them good listeners:

> They just know what to say, the right things...they know how to...say the right thing and make me feel better and realize that it's not [going to] be the end of the world if something had gone wrong.

Helping to see a different view of the problem was sometimes what the participants were looking for. Mike described how people he talks to provide this function:

> If you say something to them, they'll either make sense of them...or it won't and they'll ask you to clarify it...[listeners] express their opinion, but not over top of yours...they won't challenge your ideas...they'll listen, try to get all the facts, and then try to give you a different slant on it.

Presenting a "different slant" to adolescents may be as easy as letting them know they are not alone. Billy reflected this in his statement about how to help youth who are contemplating suicide:

> I think a big thing is that people that are suicidal, they only need to know one thing, is that...other people are there for them, to listen to them, and to...help them, because suicidal people, they can't do it alone...they just need someone to talk to...and just confide in.

Grin and Bear It

Handling or dealing with problems and stressful situations was frequently reported by participants as the meaning of coping. It does not involve solving the problem or getting rid of the stress. It appears to mean learning to live with the stress and cope with the resulting feelings, so that more serious problems do not arise. This idea was reflected in a statement by Lee: "I just try to deal with [the stress] 'cause I know there's nothing I can really do about it...School...that's not [going to] go away." Rhonda stated that "you just have to get used to it, that's all there is to it." A number of participants stated that they "ignore" the person(s) who are a cause of stress. They know that those people aren't going to change and nothing they can do will solve the

problem, so they "put up with it." Fran explained that she used to use escape as a method of coping with her family stress but now she stays and hopes that the stresses can be worked out. Fran felt that running away from the situation wasn't making it better and she stated: "I'm tired of leaving."

The idea of accepting the stress and putting up with it was expressed by many of the participants. Matt stated "pretty much just deal with it myself, grin and bear it and make it through." Mike had very strong ideas in this area and supports other participants when he explained the 'ginning and bearing it' method of coping:

> Just grin and bear it. There's not much you can do; it just makes you a stronger person...Grin and bear it because appearances are everything...people are watching you a hundred percent of the time. So if you let anything slip and show that the stress is getting to you, they're going to realize...[that you] can't do the job. I want to make sure that I'm still being really nice and everything's not showing...I kind of counteract it when I can't deal with the stress directly; kind of put a positive thing on it.

Putting a positive spin on the situation was described as a way of grinning and bearing it and as a way of interacting with people during a stressful situation: "I'll be really nice to people, more so than usual." "You're telling yourself that it's nothing, and just keep going straight and everybody will respect you for it." "We didn't let anything else get to us." Not only is grinning and bearing it a way to cope but it is also a way to show others that you can make it through the stress with little effort. The ideas that "telling yourself that it's nothing" and "everything's not showing" are participants' explanations of the importance of not letting people see how the stress is affecting them. Some participants seem to believe that becoming a stronger person and gaining respect will be achieved if you show that you can make it though a stress with little assistance and even less display of emotion.

Some participants explained that grinning and bearing it was their choice but others explained that sometimes it is the *only* way to cope. Jeff stated "[you] don't have much choice." Participants explained that if you leave the stress alone it may take care of itself. "It'll blow

over…just realize that stress isn't that bad [and] it's not going to last forever." "You just have to deal with it, there's no other way than just time." Waiting the stress out and letting time take care of it suggests that adolescents are aware of their limitations and the reality of a situation that may or may not give them a choice regarding what they can do.

Conclusion: Love and Tolerance

Participants were asked if they could think of a song that describes what they are going through as adolescents; what their lives are like. Only one song was clearly identified as a song that describes the participants' lives. "We Shall Be Free" (Davis & Brooks, 1992), has been described by Garth Brooks as a "song of love, a song of tolerance" and the following are a few lines from this song:

When the last thing we notice is the color of skin
And the first thing we look for is the beauty within

When we're free to love anyone we choose
When this world's big enough for all different views

When there's only one race and that's mankind
Then we shall be free

Georgia felt that this song was a reflection of the world today. The lyrics of this song and the fact that one of the participants chose these words to represent adolescent life, suggests that some adolescents are aware of the prejudices and biases that are present in society and would like to stop these ways of reacting to people who are perceived as different. The idea that love and tolerance is needed is a fitting end to this findings section, as participants explained that they want to be accepted for who they are, and, in order for people to do this, tolerance of differences is key. As well, participants explained that they want to know someone will be there for them to say "it's okay", and in order to do this support and love are essential.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

In this chapter a brief overview of the findings will be provided. This will be followed by a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the relevant literature. Recommendations for professional practice and future research will then be explored. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary and a review of the effectiveness of the exploratory, descriptive method for the research question of this study.

Thematic Findings

The adolescents in this research study effectively shared their thoughts, feelings, stories and experiences in order to explain the everyday stresses in their lives and how they cope with such stresses. Participants named a number of different everyday events, situations, people, feelings, and places that they perceived as stressful. The central theme that emerged from the data was the **search for identity.** Teens felt that they needed to know who they were and felt that they *needed to be known as something.* They didn't want parents trying to change them, they wanted to be accepted for who they are. This was a time of testing, a time to do *wild* and *stupid* things and to *see how far* they can go. Appearance was seen as important in establishing how they are seen by others. Looks determined if one is an individual or, on the other hand, part of a group. Adolescents felt that they were always being watched and had to be aware of how they were acting in front of others. Adolescence was the time when they had to find their place in life and the decisions made would affect the rest of their lives.

Sources of stress were many, with the **school setting** considered to be most stressful. There was a pressure to compete with each other and to do well so that future opportunities continued to exist and so they wouldn't be looked down upon if they didn't live up to the set standards. Keeping up was difficult due to lack of time, they wanted to do it all but there just

wasn't enough time. The expectation to be perfect and the pressure to do better in school were also identified as problems facing the youths in this study.

All of the adolescents in this study explained that **relationships** with teachers, peers and family were frequently sources of stress. Some teachers in the school setting were found to be unsupportive and not understanding. The participants felt that their parents didn't understand them, nor what was important to them, they were being blamed for the problems in their families. Peer relationships were stressful for a number of different reasons. Feeling different from everyone else, and not being accepted for who they were made them feel alone. Often friends' problems were too much to handle and added to their own problems because they didn't know what to do to help. Relationships with members of the opposite sex were also considered to be difficult. The commitment involved, the question of whether or not to even enter a boy/girlfriend relationship, the additional complication of sexual relations, and having things move to quickly were all seen as stressful aspects of intimate relationships.

Methods of coping with these stresses involved mainly dealing with the feelings and, at times the specific stresses produced. **Escape** was a common strategy. Escape was a way of gaining perspective, an opportunity to do what they wanted, and to be in control. Escaping was a timeout, a way to *let go* for a while, a way of finding time for oneself. While escaping, teens didn't have to think about the stress and when they went back later to the problem they were more able to deal with it. Escape was temporary, although suicide was recognized as the ultimate escape that was always there.

Knowing someone is there, that is someone to talk to and someone who will listen, was found to be essential for coping with stress. Friends were most often the "someone" needed. Friends are trustful, give honest answers, can provide a different perspective on the situation or problem, and often have gone through the same thing.

When all else failed participants reported using **grin and bear it** as a method of coping. Grinning and bearing it *makes you a stronger person* and *shows that you can handle the problem*. On the other hand it may mean that there wasn't a choice or a solution. They had to wait for the stress to go away because time was the only way to solve it.

Search for Identity

The specific stresses and coping methods shared by the participants of this study depict adolescence as a time of exploration of potentialities and a search for identity; a time to answer the question of "**Who am I**?" Some participants explained that trying to find out who they are was the stress in their lives, while others named more specific stresses that seemed to be crucial pieces to the answering this question.

Identity includes "the state or fact of remaining the same one, under varying aspects or conditions"; "the condition of being oneself and not another"; "who a person is; the state of being the same one as described"; and the "sense of self, providing sameness and continuity in personality over time" (Random House, 1995, p.668). The concept of sameness in this definition of identity suggests that who one is should be stable over both time and circumstance. Adolescence is the time of life when changes are happening rapidly, this does not allow stability to be easily accomplished nor found. The idea of 'being oneself and not another' is almost contradictory to the findings of this study. The teens in this study explained that they tried out different identities or *masks* as they attempted to find out if that role fits with who they want to be.

A 'sense of self' appears to be the meaning of identity that is most congruent with the participants' understanding of identity. Erikson used the broad term *identity* to illustrate the general 'richness' of the experience of adolescence (Atwater, 1996). The process of identity formation that is central to adolescence is a time of needed experimentation with various roles and identities and a psychological moratorium needed to encourage self discovery (Erikson,

1968). Erikson believed that "adolescence should be a time of sanctioned freedom and open exploration" (Mitchell, 1996); a time when youth "suffer more deeply then ever before or again from the confusion of roles, with the attendant danger of identity confusion" (Atwater, 1996, p.313). This is congruent with the experience of the participant who said that adolescence is the time when you are trying to get out of the confusion of this time of life. According to Muuss (1988) if adolescents have adequate opportunities to look for, experiment, and attempt different roles, this will help in the development of an identity, and establish commitments to politics, religion, vocation, sex role, and sexual preference. Erikson (1968) provided an explanation of what an optimal sense of identity is: "a sense of psychological well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of 'knowing where one is going', and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count" (p.165).

A struggle for meaning and a quest for wholeness was found by a group of researchers who examined adolescence in seven different cultures. Under the categories; gender, values and ideology, work, ethnicity, and sexuality, adolescents were found to be dealing with important choices: "who they want to be, how to relate others, what values should guide them, and what their place is in various spheres of their lives" (Garrod, Smulyan, Powers, & Kilkenny, 1995, p.7). These researchers found that the questions adolescents shared were closely related to explorations and preoccupations with the self in relation to the self, the self in relation to others, and to the wider society (Garrod et al., 1995). This balancing of the self with others is an important task within the search for an identity. Offer, Ostrov, Howard, & Atkinson (1988) state that adolescents will eventually achieve a balance; "they attain a self that can be recognized as their own, one with which there is a sense of comfort" (p.16). This need for a sense of comfort was reflected by a participant in this study, who explained that he would know his identity was formed when he could "wake up and be happy in the morning."

Being comfortable with who one is, is something that everyone, both young and old, want to achieve. This means accepting who you are, the good and the bad; and being happy with the self that is presented to significant others and the general public. For adolescents this comfort with oneself is especially important. Adolescents are trying to achieve comfort in themselves while also balancing the demands and expectations of parents, teachers, peers, and their own self. This search for comfort or an identity can be a difficult and challenging journey. The establishment of a healthy sense of identity is necessary to provide adolescents with a perspective, a way of viewing themselves and others, which prepares them to manage the majority of stress situations (Elkind, 1984).

The Future.

The task of identity building is required in order to develop a sound perspective of oneself, which includes one's past, present, and a sense of the future (Gillis, 1995). One must come to terms with and understand who they were in the past; who they are now; and who they want to be. Some of the participants were feeling pressured to learn and experience everything they needed to before they become an adult because "that is what I am for the rest of my life." Apprehension was also felt. As one participant stated; adolescence is when they are supposed to "find their place in life." Some of the participants didn't seem to know who they are now, presently, let alone who they will be in the future. W.H. Hudson (1841-1922), an author who grew up in the back country of Argentina, described his feelings and thoughts about the future while he was a teenager:

> Fifteen years old! This was indeed the most memorable day of my life, for on that evening I began to think about...what I was, what I was in the world for, what I wanted, what destiny was going to make of me! Or was it for me to do just what I wished, to shape my own destiny?...It was the first time such questions had come to me, and I was startled at them. It was as though I had only just become conscious; I doubt that I had ever been fully conscious before (Kiell, 1964, p.863).

This process of assessing the future is an intrinsic and inevitable result of human intelligence and is an important factor in the building of identity among adolescents (Mitchell, 1986). Participants of this study mentioned future in two distinctly different perspectives. Some participants felt that the future held the answers to their life; this is when they would know who they are and there would not be any more worries. Other participants felt apprehension about the future. They felt that money would be a problem and they were scared for their future children. One participant illustrated her feeling of anxiety for both the present and the future, when she stated that she wanted to go back to when she was two or three years old, when there weren't any problems or worries.

Pressures and Influences.

"Today's child has become the unwilling, unintended victim of overwhelming stress- the stress borne of rapid, bewildering social change and constantly rising expectations" (Elkind, 1981, p.3). The importance of society and its expectations of adolescents has been explored by a number of researchers and was also described by participants in this study. When participants described where they felt the pressures and expectations came from, they reported that parents provide some of this stress, but that society as whole seems to produce these expectations. Participants seemed to feel there will not be a place for everyone; they must compete for "limited resources." During adolescence academic, interpersonal, and extra curricular achievements are expected, and parents become more particular in their demands and expectations (Elkind, 1981). For many adolescents, the only expectation that they face is that of being a good student but not all youth can be a good student, and even if they were, "being a good student hardly exhausts the potentialities of a young person" (Csikszentmihalyi & Schmidt, 1998, p.8). Participants of this study seemed to be facing this expectation to do well in school and to be *perfect*, while also trying to incorporate the other aspects of their lives (relationships, sports, jobs, outside interests) that parents were perceived to not recognize as important to their children.

In North American culture the need to struggle and work at one's identity during adolescence is of great importance due to the fact that youth are not being provided with productive support to help guide their search for identity (Mitchell, 1992). Mitchell states that other circumstances in North America are also seen as problematic, in that they shape adolescence into a time of life that is not good for feeling worthwhile about oneself. First, opportunities to participate in worthwhile work or inherently meaningful activities are not easily available. Participants who described feeling the most comfortable with who they were, were participating in extra curricular activities; such as Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), students council, sports teams, and a peer church group. Second, the institutions and schools, where most of youths' time is spent, rewards conformity and uniformity (Mitchell, 1992). The rewarding of conformity and uniformity by schools does not complement the need for adolescents to be recognized as special or different within the institutional environment.

Mitchell's third circumstance for adolescents not feeling good about themselves is that hypocrisy and high egocentrism form a basis for shallow superficiality that characterizes the adolescent culture. The superficiality and the hypocrisy of adolescents was recognized by the participants of this study. The importance of appearance over other personal characteristics clearly demonstrated how adolescents use superficial criteria to judge their peers, and themselves. This use of appearance as a method of judgement is an example of both the superficiality and hypocrisy of adolescents. The same adolescents who stated that they are hurt when people make fun of how they look and don't feel accepted because people judge them by their perceived flaws or inadequacies, are the same adolescents who speak badly about peers because they aren't as attractive as they must be to fit in and be accepted. Kiell (1964) described the "cyclic" and contrary behaviour of adolescents, which occur in periods of impulsivity and then periods of inhibition, "his individualism and rebelliousness and his need for direction and help, his know-it-

all façade and his awful feeling of inadequacy, his restlessness and serenity, are all symptomatic of his fight between advance to maturity and retardation in childhood" (p.222).

Contradictions.

Hall (1904), who coined the phrase "adolescence", saw adolescence as a time of transition towards adulthood that is full of contradictory emotions and behaviours: "selfishness and altruism, sensitivity and cruelty, radicalism and conservatism. Through the struggle of adolescence, the individual is reborn, a new self is created, ready to assume a role in modern society" (Garrod et al., 1995, p.2). The idea of a 'new self' being created out of the struggle with contradictory feelings and behaviours is an appropriate illustration of what adolescents are going through while finding out who they are. Adolescents in this study explained that they wanted to be accepted for who they are, while at the same time they demonstrated critical and non-accepting behaviours of their peers. If all adolescents behave in such a way then perhaps the balance between being accepted and being judged will help produce a new self.

The need to be different and unique was shared by participants in this study. According to Mitchell (1992), this is a result of the persistent egocentrism of adolescence, called, by Elkind (1981), the *personal fable*. The personal fable asserts that adolescents believe that no one can understand them because their experiences are more deep, their intellect is more advanced, and their fears are more fearful (Mitchell, 1992). This idea was reflected in participant statements that explained that parents don't understand because they have never felt such difficult emotions. As much as adolescents feel they are unique they consistently undergo the challenge and need to find friends or peers who have experienced the same problems or felt the same emotions. Participants felt that most people can not understand their complexities but in order to not feel so isolated with themselves and their feelings, they search for friends or peers who have, indeed, experienced the same stresses and feelings. Mitchell (1992) states that the personal fable "elevates the adolescents' sense of uniqueness into the stratosphere" (p.41) but it can also

strengthen the importance and necessity of peer relationships because of their special qualities of empathy and understanding.

The personal fable may also be useful in understanding the *wild* and *stupid things* adolescents do while trying to find out who they are and how far they can go. The personal fable begins to explain risk taking behaviour; the "belief in one's own invulnerability" (Elkind, 1981, p.115). Participants explained that many people their age don't think they will be hurt, they can do anything and they keep going and often only stop when someone or something makes them (parents, the law, injury, death). Elkind (1981) explained that the personal fable can be an adaptive concept because with all of the fear in the world if people did not act on the assumption that they are relatively immune from danger, people would never leave their homes "but there is also a danger in taking one's fable too seriously, and when this happens young people take unnecessary risks" (p. 115). Elkind went on to explain that a stressed adolescent who has "a heightened fable is more likely to act on the fable, ignoring the factual knowledge of the risks involved" (1981, p.115). The personal fable may help to explain some of the *wild* behaviours of youth, it may also begin to explain the lack of responsibility some adolescents assume when they enter sexual relationships. Methods of escaping shared by participants may also reflect the idea that some youth believe they can't be hurt, such as "looking for the better high" and becoming more involved with drugs and alcohol.

Csikszentmihalyi & Schmidt (1998) assert that most of the causes of adolescent mortality are linked to accidents, suicides, drugs, and violence, and because of this adults need to watch for signs of excessive boredom and frustration, which are frequently their causes. A youth who is often bored or anxious, or "always lonely or always in the company of peers, who lacks intense interests and seems to have few sources of joy is likely to turn to more destructive forms of engagement with the world" (Csikszentmihalyi & Schmidt, 1998, p.14).

Supporting adolescents in their search for who they are and providing opportunities for exploring and taking part in worthwhile activities should help adolescents in coping with the present stresses and worries confronting them. Part of attaining a healthy sense of identity is having someone with whom to relate; someone that one can turn to for guidance and someone who helps to support and develop self-esteem. Participants in this study suggested mentors for teenagers. This recommendation is important and has been recognized by some members of the community. During the writing of this thesis the researcher became aware of pubic service announcements on both American and Canadian television channels that promoted and advertised the need for community members to become involved in young people's lives through mentorship programs. This illustrates that communities are recognizing the importance of providing support and being involved with their children and youth.

In order to understand extremes of behaviour and the divergence of mood, which adolescents frequently exhibit, the concept of *narcissism* is useful. Narcissism recognizes that adolescents' self is "grandiose, inflated and exaggerated while at the same time fragile, vulnerable and minimal" (Mitchell, 1992, p.54). This demonstrates another way in which adolescents present opposite and contradictory, even hypocritical, thoughts and behaviours. Participants in this study discussed the extreme behaviours of adolescents and supported the idea of narcissism. Participants explained that youth who take part in dangerous and irresponsible behaviours think they are grown up and responsible, when actually they are proving that their sense of self is quite tenuous and that they are not ready for adulthood.

Mitchell (1992) provided an explanation that helps to understand why extreme behaviours are often prominent in adolescence; he states that the lack of access to worthwhile activities, and very few opportunities for dignified expression exist for youth. Instead, society provides, seemingly, unlimited access to those activities that can be described as "carnival showmanship, street corner theatrics, defiance, negation and other forms of juvenile self-

assertion, which are narcissistic in character and which effectively isolate youth from the important machinery of society" (Mitchell, 1992, p.55). Such acts of defiance, that Mitchell characterizes as narcissism, seem to be necessary for the formation of an identity. As seen in this study, adolescents are attempting to figure out who they want to be, which may require acts of showmanship or self-assertion because they are attempting to find out what fits with who they are and what behaviours get the desired response from those who are watching. Erikson stated that late adolescents, in particular, actively participate in self-exploration, for the purpose of developing a satisfying, personal identity (Atwater, 1996). Such self-exploration requires one to be at least moderately narcissistic. Adolescents are trying to understand themselves and their peers, which must lead them to be quite involved with themselves. Hopefully, such self-absorbtion will allow teens to become comfortable with who they are so that eventually they can become effectively involved with the community and rely less on behaviours that are undertaken to attain reactions.

Relationships.

Some of the people watching and providing reactions are adolescents' friends. Friends who are understanding and trustful were described by participants as essential for helping to cope with their stress. Part of this understanding involves accepting each other for both their failings and limitations and seeing those characteristics as favourable (Mitchell, 1992). Adolescents in this study said that knowing someone is there for them and accepting of who they are is an important part of friendship. One of the participants explained that in order to have honest friendships adolescents need to know who they are. This idea is supported by Mitchell (1992) when he concluded that both self-knowledge and maturity of identity are necessary for genuine friendships. Erikson (1980) also reflected this idea when he explained that the term "identity" connotes a sameness with oneself and a sharing of one's essential character with others. Honesty is an aspect of a genuine friendship. Such honesty, requires friends to provide an accurate

description of the actions and motives of each other. Unfortunately many friends of teens only provide a flattering mirror, as opposed to an accurate mirror (Mitchell, 1992). An accurate reflection was reported by participants as necessary to help each other cope. Others could assist in making sense of the situation and help prevent one another from overreacting and focusing only on the emotional aspects of the situation.

Relationships were explored as a stress in participants' lives. Parents, peers, boyfriends, girlfriends, best friends and siblings all have the potential to be stressful factors in adolescents' lives. Participants explained that parents didn't understand, friends had problems of their own that added to their stress, and boy/girlfriends caused stress because of the added responsibilities. Elkind (1981) found that adolescent attachments to parents and others are more complex and go through changes, which include dependence being transformed into "independence in the emotional, intellectual, and social domains" (p.3). This independence "requires the renegotiation of relations with parents and movement from a situation characterized by compliance to one of greater mutuality between the parties" (Zani, 1993, p. 97). This renegotiation was a challenge to which many participants referred. Participants explained that they wanted to have a good relationship with their family but sometimes it was difficult because their parents did not understand what was important to them, which was frequently the increasing importance of friends. Participants also described their need to be accepted for who they are. They wanted parents to accept the choices they made and the dreams that they had built. This acceptance is important because "during adolescence, youngsters become aware, probably for the first time, of their existential loneliness and unique individuality" (Zani, 1993, p.95). This recognition of loneliness may be part of the reason that peers are considered to be so important to teens. The need to know that someone is always there, as a way of coping, may also serve as an essential method of fighting off loneliness, while coping with other stresses.

Friends and peers are not only important and useful for helping each other cope with the stresses in their lives, they are also necessary factors in each others' search of identity. Adolescents see their peers as giving support in "defining identity, interests, abilities and personality, in building reputations and in developing a balance between individuality and conformity" (Kirchler, Palmonari, & Pombeni, 1993, p.148). Participants in this study explored this struggle between wanting to be different and special, and wanting to fit in and be accepted within a group of peers. Erikson (1968) explained such identity formation in psychological terms and explores the importance of others:

> Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them (p.22).

This concept of being judged by others was a feeling that was clearly expressed by participants. They felt that they were always being watched and their peers would point out if they looked like they were "trying to be like" someone that they weren't. This attempt at building an identity using the ideas and dreams of oneself while also incorporating the criticisms and judgements of others was a challenge with which participants felt they must deal. Erikson (1968) explained this adolescent struggle "they are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (p.128).

Trying out various behaviours, beliefs, appearances and acts were demonstrated by study participants, *masks* allowed adolescents to assume various roles until they found one that *fit*. Such experimentation is supported by most experts who define adolescence as "a period of life when a wide range of experimentation is necessary simply to be able to understand the array of life decisions required in our culture" (Mitchell, 1992, p.125). Being able to try out different things and being able to make decisions include the following situations or choices of adolescent life: groups of friends; jobs and extracurricular activities; religious affiliation; family

involvement; intimate relationships; and drugs and alcohol. The metaphor of adolescents using masks can be linked to Goffman's concept of self-presentation, which states that "the self is an actor in a drama, with the individual as playwright and the persons with who he or she is interacting as audience" (Offer et al., 1988, p.20). Participants of this study described their feelings of always being watched, which is similar to being on a stage in front of an audience that will judge how they look and act.

The idea that adults, especially parents, don't understand what adolescents are going through or what is important to them came through clearly in participant discussions. This non-understanding may be because participants aren't telling their parents what they feel or what is going on. The teens believed that their parents wouldn't understand and if they were aware of what was going on, it may have made things at home more difficult. This appears to be another example of the contradictory behaviours and thoughts that seem to characterize the participants in this study. They want to be understood but aren't willing to give the necessary information needed by parents to attain a level of understanding. In Mitchell's book: *Adolescent Vulnerability* (1996), he includes in its introduction the following statement "We mistakenly assume that youth will master certain tasks on their own which consistently they do not; and at the opposite extreme, we assume that our youngsters will avoid self-destructive habits when, consistently they do not" (p.xi). Mitchell explained that these assumptions are a result of misunderstandings regarding "how teens think and reason, how they form and dissolve relationships, how they evaluate themselves, how they react to drugs, sex, love, and violence" (1996, p.xi). Older persons may fail to understand new trends that adolescents display, they may also see youth as "their own demise", and the "erosion of their coveted values" (Offer et al., 1988, p.121). The idea that older people may see adolescents as destructive or lacking the values that they had when they were teens is quite plausible. Often all adults have to base their opinions on are appearances, that are frequently derived from media presentations.

Bandura (1980) argues that if society labels and expects teenagers' behaviour to be rebellious, unpredictable, wild, and sloppy, and if this is consistently reinforced by the mass media, "such cultural expectations may force adolescents into roles that may not otherwise have been natural to them (Mitchell, 1986). Bandura (1980) uses the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy as another reason as to why the nature of adolescence is misperceived and as an insight into why adolescents of our culture are understood, or misunderstood, in the manner they are (Mitchell, 1986).

Coping

The challenge of balancing a search for identity with the stresses of daily life requires adolescents to find ways to cope that work for them. Adolescents use various methods of coping depending on the specific stress, the resources available, and the extent of the emotions involved. Finding the right balance is essential to effective coping. During discussions of coping, participants seemed to be balancing ways of coping with the emotional consequences of stress, while directly dealing with or confronting their problems, and at the same time they wanted to get away from the stressful feelings and situations.

The adolescents in this study described the most popular method of coping they use as *escape*. Participants described escape as a release that helps make the stress not seem so bad. Escape as a method of dealing with stress seemed to be needed to avoid negative feelings. Participants explained that getting away and forgetting about the problem was helpful and made them feel better. Escape was also described by participants as a method of relieving boredom. The method of escape to relieve boredom was frequently using drugs and alcohol. Some of the teens reported that "there is nothing else to do" and "it makes things bearable." *Grin and bear it* was another coping strategy described by participants of this study. This method was explained as useful when there didn't seem to be an answer to the problem or when time was thought to be the only thing that would alter the stressful situation.

NOTE TO USERS

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Seiffge-Krenke & Shulman (1998) support the importance of dealing with feelings and emotions and state that no reaction can be effective as a coping method. Reducing the negative effects of a range of stressful events is important and can occur through cognitive and behavioural efforts to alter the source of stress and by attempts to regulate the negative emotions associated with stressful circumstances (Compas, 1987). This explanation of the importance of decreasing the negative effects of stress was reflective of what participants in this study felt they must do to cope with the everyday stress in their lives. Frequently the active role they took in coping was to talk about their stress and learn from others who have also experienced that particular problem. Escaping from the stress or grinning and bearing it may initially be seen as inactive or emotion-focused coping but if the use of the time away from the problem or the use of time as a solution was examined for its purpose, escape and grinning and bearing it may actually be recognized as active coping. Participants stated that these methods were necessary to gain a new perspective and to come back with a clearer thought so that if more active coping or problem solving is possible it can take place.

The experimentation, the thoughtfulness, and the time needed for adolescents to build an identity and be comfortable with who they are may take destructive or unhealthy turns during exploration but assuming that adolescents will "consistently" make such poor decisions is unfair. Understanding where the variety of misconceptions originate regarding the nature of adolescence by researchers, practitioners, and the society at large is useful to initiate the exploration and discovery of more comprehensive and timely images of today's adolescents. The researcher of this study views adolescents as needing to fit in; wanting to be different; self-absorbed, even narcissistic during times of self-exploration; thoughtful; hypocritical and contradictory; anxious to get to their future; worried about their future; dependent on friends; needing time to get away; needing to know someone will always be there for them; wanting to relate to someone; wanting to make a difference; and looking forward to knowing who they are and being comfortable with that

person. These are a lot of wants and needs, not all of them are exclusive to adolescents, but understanding how they contribute to the actions and behaviours of adolescents could be very helpful. This understanding could be beneficial when trying to help teens so that during the exploration and identity building stage, destructive and harmful activities can be kept to a minimum and healthy, happy adolescents can make their life decisions with confidence.

Review of the Research Methods

An exploratory, descriptive method was used to generate an understanding of adolescent stress and coping. Data attained directly from adolescents was the source of information used to explore, describe, and answer the research question. Analysis of the data was completed using the content analysis approach, which yielded the core categories and related sub-categories.

Strengths

The use of flexible, open-ended questions was valuable and effective for exploring new and unanticipated information provided by participants, and for allowing the voice and perspectives of adolescents to be presented. Focus groups also provided opportunities for participants to share and discuss their similarities and differences in their ideas. All focus group sessions and follow-up interviews were conducted by the researcher. This involvement enhanced and promoted familiarity with the data, which strengthened the work of data analysis. Focus group sessions were convenient and time efficient for collecting data. Participants who were approached to inquire as to whether or not they would like to be involved in a follow-up interview were asked if they would prefer this interview to take place over the phone or in person. All follow-up interview participants chose telephone interviews, which were both convenient and less intrusive to the participants and the researcher.

Limitations

Telephone interviews, although convenient, did not allow the researcher to use physical signals of the participants as cues for probes or requests for clarification. The researcher relied on

the verbal signals of participants. The physical environment of the school, where focus group sessions took place, may have contributed to participants' emphasis on school stress. Perhaps if focus groups were conducted in a neutral setting identified stresses may not have been concentrated in the school setting. The restricted number and homogeneous features of participants are limitations of this study. All participants were high school students, ages 15 to 17. In addition, there is the possibility of a selection bias, as participants volunteered to be in the study.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged from this study after learning about and understanding the perspectives of the adolescents who participated in this study. These suggestions are meant to be of use to anyone who is interested in working with adolescents and helping them to achieve success and health during their adolescent life, and subsequently their future adult life.

A health promotion perspective would be beneficial for anyone interested in improving the health and quality of life of the adolescent population. Health promotion is "any activity or program designed to improve social and environmental living conditions such that people's experience of well-being is increased" (Labonte, 1993). A major goal of adolescent health promotion is the improvement of health and quality of life (Gillis, 1995). Adolescent health promotion programs will likely be successful if they "identify adolescents' unmet needs, set goals for health promotion, and consider the developmental characteristics of adolescents" (Gillis, 1995, p.323). The following are recommended ways in which adolescent health promotion programs can be useful and successful: (1) incorporate adolescents as equal participants with adults in the planning and delivery of programs and provide recreation facilities and gathering places to encourage healthy behaviours instead of detrimental behaviours undertaken to relieve boredom; (2) provide individual attention and counseling that can be found within and outside of

the school setting, helping adolescents recognize and deal with peer pressure and influence; and (3) provide access to education materials and counseling in the area of sex and relationships.

Those who support adolescents should be aware of what stresses adolescents are facing and what stresses are capable of being solved and what stresses are not. Adolescents report that they need time alone, time with friends and time to think and relax. Getting away and escaping does not need to be seen as avoidance or an inappropriate method of coping, in fact, it may be a necessary pre-requisite to coping effectively with stressful situations.

Understanding the importance that adolescents place on talking and having someone to listen is necessary. Participants agreed on the usefulness of talking but the role of the listener is dependent on the adolescent and the stress. Some adolescents want advice whereas others just want someone to be there and listen. For this reason perhaps adults should make themselves available to support adolescents when the adolescent's friends are not available or useful. This would involve trusting in youth to seek help and being there for them when they do want help, advice, or information. In addition, participants said, themselves, that they frequently need limits set so that they do not have to go too far before they are stopped.

Perfection was an expectation that participants perceived their parents held for them. Perfection is also one of the common characteristics of suicidal individuals. Whether or not the concept of perfection originated within the youth or is perceived as coming from external sources, when youth explain that they *can not* be perfect or, on the other hand, that they *should* be perfect, they should be listened to carefully and supported. Leaving room for adolescents to make mistakes and emphasizing a focus on being the best that they can may be a very positive method of support.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research resulted in the formation of a number of themes that could serve as a basis for future research. (1) Performing a quality of life assessment as part of studies of adolescent

stress and coping would be beneficial so as to demonstrate how well adolescents are coping with stress in the face of additional factors present in their environment, that effect their health and well-being. A quality of life framework would not only be useful for research purposes but it would also allow professionals to determine health needs and priorities; to develop and implement programs; and to evaluate the success of such programs. Quality of life as both a framework and assessment tool would ensure that the needs and determinants of adolescents' health are being addressed in the most appropriate and effective manner. (2) As a general recommendation for future studies, more research utilizing qualitative methods would be beneficial to continue to attain a more in depth understanding of the adolescent experience. (3) Adolescents have been found to display numerous contradictions, which future studies could further explore and describe. For example, what is boredom in adolescence? This question originated out of the participants' statements explaining why they use drugs and alcohol. They said that getting high was a way to escape the boredom and there was nothing else to do, yet they also explained that there wasn't enough time for them to do everything they wanted. (4) A closer examination of escape and grin and bear it, as coping methods would be useful. As such methods are often perceived to be inferior to more problem-solving focused strategies, it would be useful to further examine the benefits of escape and grin and bear it, and when they do indeed become ineffective and perhaps destructive.

Summary

The intent of this study was to find out how adolescents cope with the stresses in their lives. This was achieved by giving adolescents the opportunity to describe the everyday stresses they face and the methods they use to cope with these stresses. The stresses found to be facing the participants of this study were centered around the search for identity. These stresses frequently were factors that contribute to each adolescents' identity. The coping methods that participants explained as being effective were primarily methods that allowed them to deal with

the feelings and emotions that were caused by the stress(es). These coping methods describe adolescents as in need of people to talk to and listen, and also in need of *time*. Time to themselves, time to experience, and time to learn who they are.

The need for acknowledging the stresses facing adolescents everyday is supported by the emotional problems Canadian youth appear to be facing and also by the suicide rates of youth in Canada and, in particular, Alberta. Efforts aimed towards the empowerment of adolescents during their search for independence and identity would be an effective direction to take so that their health can be protected, promoted, and enhanced. Viewing adolescents as capable and holistic beings and allowing them a voice in the attainment of better health and well-being is essential for the development of successful interventions and programs.

Adolescents need support, recognition and hope for their future. The future is not only a period of time that is out of reach; it is the past, it is the present, and it is the combination of the experiences from these periods of time. How adolescents cope with the circumstances, situations, and events that may be stressful will help determine their future; and by supporting, recognizing and offering hope for this future adolescents will be able to cope with the present in anticipation of the future, and acceptance of their present self. Offer et al. (1988), from their study of adolescents from ten countries around the world, provide a concluding remark that mirrors my feelings, as a researcher, who has undergone a valuable learning experience and research endeavor:

> ***Our feeling is one of optimism rather than pessimism. When asked, youth willingly share their inner world. They share feelings and thoughts that reflect their vibrancy and eagerness to assume adult roles. Our feeling, after listening to them, is reciprocal to theirs. We are happy that it is they who will inherit the earth*** (p.25).

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Appendix A
Study Volunteer Information Sheet

Research Title: Adolescent Coping: Adolescent's Perspectives
Researcher: Jocelyn Edey
Department of Health Promotion
University of Alberta
Telephone-461-1755

Thesis Supervisor: Wendy Austin, RN, B.Sc.N., M.Ed., Ph.D.
Faculty of Nursing
University of Alberta
Telephone-492-5250

Purpose of study: To increase understanding of how adolescents cope with the day to day stresses in their lives. This information will help to improve the health promotion policies and programs for adolescents.

Procedure: You will take part in one peer group session. The group will last for about one hour and will be tape recorded. Individual follow up interviews may be needed. At this time anything that you do not want to talk about with the group can be discussed. The interview will last no more than 1 hour. The sessions will take place at the University, high school, or another place that is best for all volunteers. The interview can be over the telephone, if we can not meet face to face. These interviews will also be tape recorded.

Participation: It is your choice to take part in the study. You are free to drop out any time, without answering questions or giving a reason. Dropping out of the study will not result in any negative effects from your school. This study is totally separate from your school.

Possible benefits of taking part in this study are providing information to help other youths and being part of a fun, supportive and interesting group. Possible risks of being part of the study are loss of time and the chance of talking about unpleasant memories.

Your name will not be typed on the written copies of the taped interviews. All transcripts, tapes, and forms will be stored in locked file cabinets. The tapes will be destroyed 7 years after the study is finished. Consent forms will be destroyed after 5 years. The typed interviews and notes will be kept for an unknown length of time. This data may be used for future studies. Ethics approval will be necessary for this. Information from the study will be shared with only the researcher's committee. The researcher cannot guarantee that the other students in the group will not share information, but everyone will be reminded to keep what they hear in group sessions confidential. The results of this study may be published and presented at conferences. **You will not be identified in any way.**

If information is given that reveals abusive activities or the chance of self-harm, the researcher is required to discuss this with you, your parents, and the researchers supervisor. After this discussion, if further action is required the needed steps will be taken. The researcher will help you contact resources or refer you to a counselor if needed.

Any questions or concerns you may have about this research project can be directed to Jocelyn Edey or her thesis supervisor.

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Part 1

Title of Project: Adolescent Coping: Adolescent's Perspectives

Principle Investigator: Jocelyn Edey
University of Alberta
Master of Science in Health Promotion
Ph. 461-1755

Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Austin
Faculty of Nursing
University of Alberta
Ph. 492-5250

If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you may contact the Central Administration Office of your school board.

Part 2 (to be completed by research volunteer):

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? Yes No

Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet? Yes No

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research study? Yes No

Have you had a chance to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes No

Do you understand that you are free to drop out from the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect your school grades. Yes No

Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access the transcripts of your group sessions and interviews? Yes No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I agree to take part in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Research Participant	Date	Witness
_____		_____
Printed Name		Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and Voluntarily agrees to participate. _____
Signature of Researcher or Designee / Date

Appendix C

Parent's Study Information Sheet

Research Title: Adolescent Coping: Adolescent's Perspectives

Researcher: Jocelyn Edey
Department of Health Promotion
University of Alberta
Telephone-461-1755

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Austin
Faculty of Nursing
University of Alberta
Telephone-492-5250

Purpose of study: To increase understanding of how adolescents cope with day to day stresses in their lives. This information is intended to improve the health promotion policies and programs for adolescents, so as to promote mental their health and well-being.

Procedure: Participants will take part in one group session with other teens and may be interviewed alone by the researcher at another time. The group sessions and interviews will last for about one hour and will be tape recorded. Group sessions and interviews will take place at the University, the school, or another place that is mutually convenient. The interview may take place over the telephone, if in-person interviews are not possible. These interviews will also be tape recorded.

Participation: Your child does **not** have to participate. Participants can drop out of the study at any time, without answering questions or giving a reason. Dropping out of the study will not result in any negative effects from the school. This study is in conjunction with he school.

Possible benefits for taking part in this study include generating knowledge to help other youths and being part of an enjoyable, supportive and interesting activity. Possible risks of being part of the study are loss of time and the chance of talking about unpleasant memories.

All information regarding your child's identity will be kept anonymous. Instead of using participant names codes will be used to for identification. Information obtained from the study will be shared with the researcher's committee and this information will be held in confidence.

All responses given by your child will be confidential, except in the case of abusive or self-harm information being revealed. If your child provides information that reveals abusive activities or the chance of self-harm, the researcher is required to discuss this with you, your child, and the researcher's supervisor. After this discussion, if further action is required the needed steps will be taken.

Written copies of the taped interviews will be made by a typist who will replace names with codes. All transcripts, tapes, and forms will be stored in locked file cabinets. The tapes will be destroyed after 7 years following study completion. Consent forms will be destroyed after 5 years. The typed interviews and notes will be kept for an infinite length of time. This data may be used for future studies. Ethics approval will be necessary for this. The results of this study may be published and presented at conferences. **Your child will not be identified in any way.**

Any questions or concerns you may have about this research project can be directed to

Jocelyn Edey or her thesis supervisor.

Appendix D

Parent Consent Form

Part 1

Title of Project: Adolescent Coping: Adolescent's Perspectives

Principle Investigator: Jocelyn Edey
University of Alberta
Master of Science in Health Promotion
Ph. 461-1755

Supervisor: Dr. Wendy Austin
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University of Alberta
Ph. 492-5250

Permission has been granted by the school board to conduct this study. If you have any concerns about any aspect of this study, you may contact the Central Administration Office of your school board.

If you do not return this form your child cannot take part in this study.

Part 2 (to be completed by parent of research volunteer):

Do you understand that your child has been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	Yes	No
Do understand the benefits and risks involved in your child taking part in this study?	Yes	No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
Do you understand that your child is free to refuse to take part or drop out from the study at any time? He/she does not have to give a reason and it not affect your child's school grades.	Yes	No
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you in the information letter? Do you understand who will have access the transcripts of the group sessions and interviews?	Yes	No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I give my consent for my child to take part in the study if they want to take part.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Parent	Date	Witness
_____		_____
Printed Name		Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to give consent. _____

Signature of Researcher or Designee / Date

Appendix E

Questionnaire for Descriptive Data

Age _____

Sex _____

Grade _____

How well do you think you are doing in school? _____

_____

What are your future plans for after graduating high school? _____

_____

Who do you live with in your home? _____

_____

What are the extra curricular activities you take part in? _____

What do you do for fun? _____

_____

Do you have job? How many hours a week? Doing what? _____

_____

Appendix F

Examples of Guiding Questions

- Do you have stress? What is stress to you?
- What are common stresses you deal/cope with?
- Have your stresses changed over time? Type? Duration?
- Can you tell me how you deal with stresses in your life?
- Have the ways you deal with stresses changed over time?
- What or who are the most important sources of support you use to deal with stress?
- Have these sources changed over time?
- Are there any sources of support or services that you feel would be beneficial that are not available to you now?
- Can you think of a time when you did not deal with stress in an effective way? What would you do differently if you could do it again?
- Can you describe ways that other people your age do not deal with stress in effective ways? Why do you think they were not effective?
- Do you have any suggestions for programs or services that could help adolescents cope better with stress and promote well-being?

Appendix G

University of Alberta
Edmonton
Canada T6G 2G4

Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine
Rehabilitation Research Centre
3-48 Corbett Hall
Director (403) 492-7856 Telephone (403) 492-2903
Fax (403) 492-1626

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA HEALTH SCIENCES FACULTIES, CAPITAL HEALTH AUTHORITY, AND CARITAS HEALTH GROUP

HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

Date: November 1997

Name(s) of Principal Investigator(s): Jocelyn Edey

Organization(s): University of Alberta

Department: Graduate Program, Centre for Health Promotion Studies

Project Title: Adolescent Coping: The Adolescent's Perspective

The Health Research Ethics Board has reviewed the protocol for this project and found it to be acceptable within the limitations of human experimentation. The Health Research Ethics Board has also reviewed and approved the patient information material and consent form.

The approval for the study as presented is valid for one year. It may be extended following the completion of a progress report form which will be sent to you in a year's time. Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the Health Research Ethics Board for approval.

Sharon Warren

Dr. Sharon Warren
Chair of the Health Research Ethics Board (B: Health Research)

File number: B-101197-UA